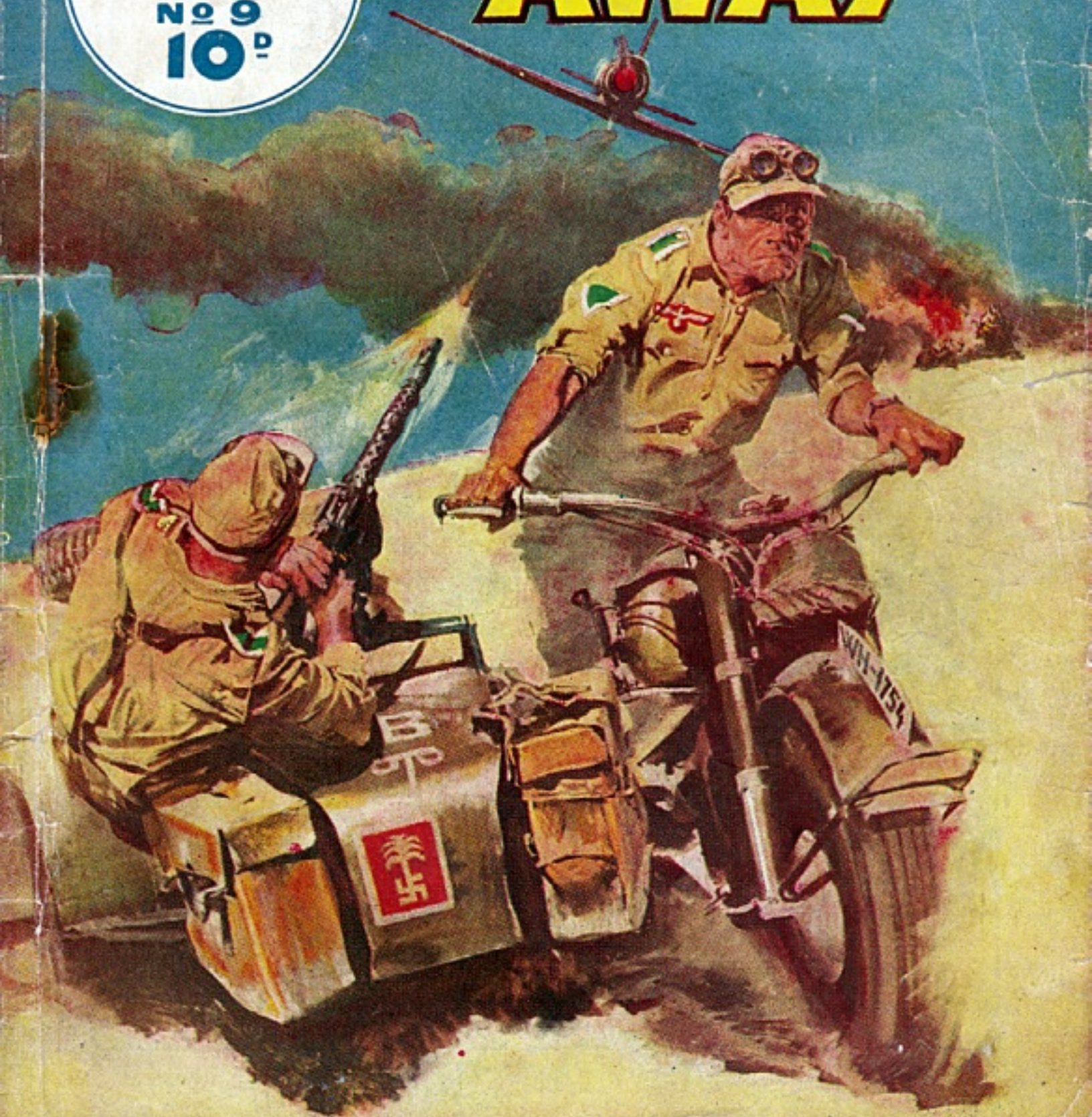


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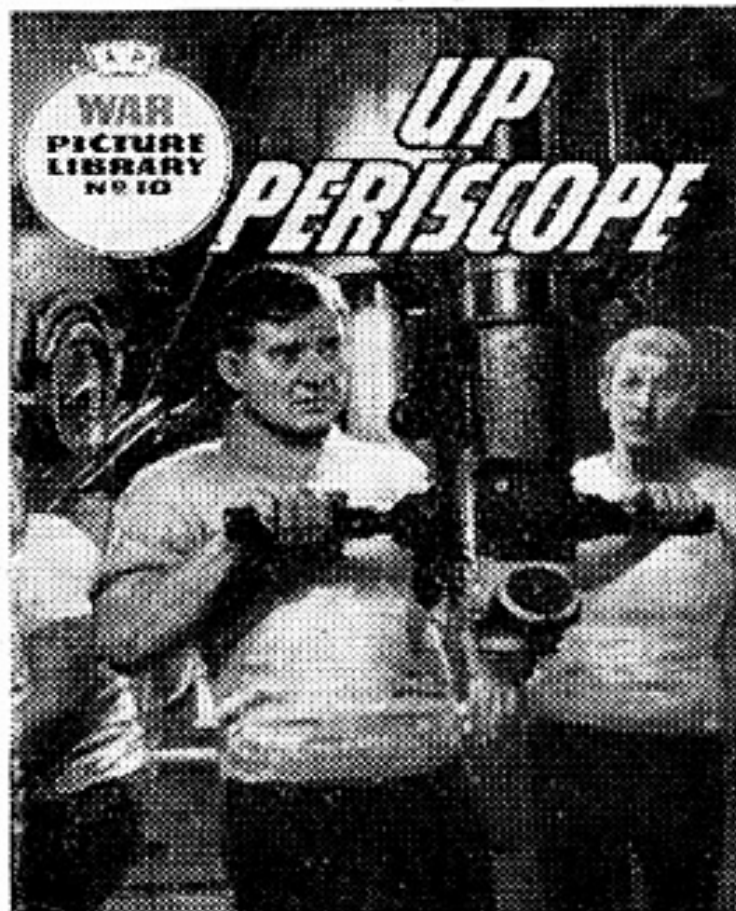
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BOMBS AWAY

Chapter 1. A LAST MESSAGE

NOVEMBER 1941. SEVENTY MILES BEHIND THE GERMAN AND ITALIAN FRONT LINE IN THE WESTERN DESERT LAY THE GALLANT ALLIED GARRISON OF TOBRUK. ROMMEL, THE GERMAN ARMY COMMANDER, PLANNED TO ASSAULT THIS CONSTANT THREAT TO HIS LINES OF COMMUNICATION ON NOVEMBER 23RD. BUT ON NOVEMBER 18TH, IN HEAVY RAIN, THE EIGHTH ARMY LEAPT FORWARD, FORESTALLING THE ENEMY ATTACK.



DRIVING UPWARDS FROM THE SOUTH, 30 CORPS MET LITTLE OPPOSITION DURING THE FIRST DAY. THEN, AROUND SIDI REZEGH THEY STRUCK THE ENEMY'S MAIN DEFENCE LINE . . .

THE BATTLE WAS ON!

... PINNED DOWN BY ENEMY FIRE FROM RIDGE ON OUR RIGHT FRONT. REQUEST AIR SUPPORT.



THE NETWORK OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN FORWARD TROOPS AND THE ROYAL AIR FORCE WAS CLOSE AND EFFICIENT. AT A FORWARD AIRFIELD, SQUADRON LEADER BILL HUNTER AND HIS MEN EAGERLY ANSWERED THE CALL . . .

SCRAMBLE! SCRAMBLE!



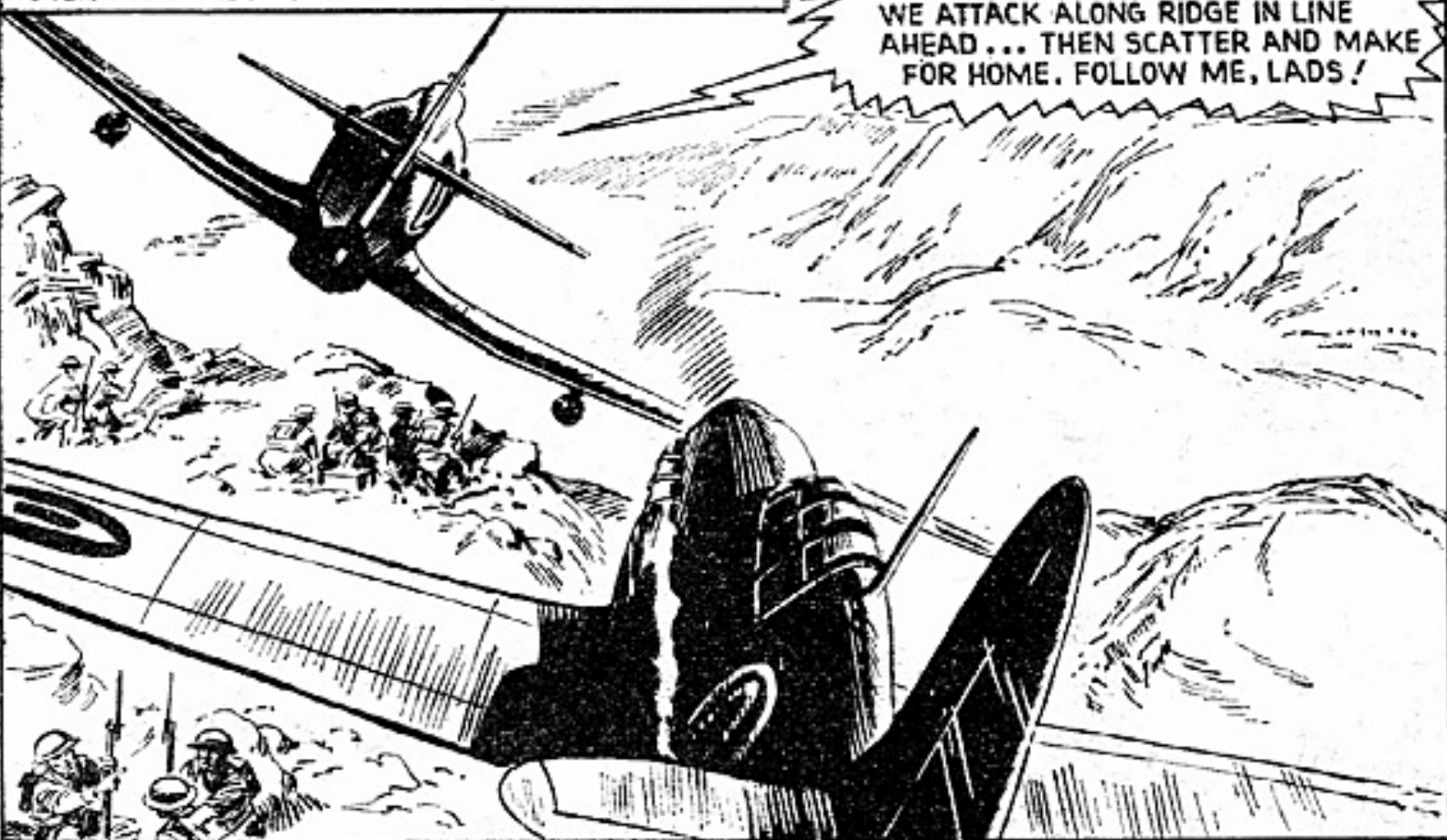
ACTION AT LAST.
RACE YOU TO YOUR PLANE,
BILL, YOU OLD FOSSIL!

CALM DOWN, RIP...
YOU'LL FIND ACTION ENOUGH
TO SATISFY EVEN YOU.

INSEPARABLE COMRADES, BILL HUNTER AND HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT RIP JACKSON, LED THE HURRICANE FIGHTER BOMBER SQUADRON INTO THE AIR.

BEFORE LONG THE HURRIBOMBERS WERE SWOOPING
OVER THE HEADS OF THE BRITISH TROOPS ...

RED LEADER CALLING ...
TARGET AT FOOT OF RIDGE ...
WE ATTACK ALONG RIDGE IN LINE
AHEAD ... THEN SCATTER AND MAKE
FOR HOME. FOLLOW ME, LADS!



WING TIPS PERILOUSLY
BRUSHING THE SIDE OF
THE HILL, THE PLANES
DIVED AT THE ENEMY
GUNS, THEIR BOMBS
FALLING AT POINT
BLANK RANGE.

HIMMEL!
WHERE IS THE
LUFTWAFFE?



IN THIRTY SECONDS, THE GERMAN BATTERY WAS REDUCED TO A CHAOS OF TWISTED METAL AND EXPLODING AMMUNITION.

FORWARD,
MEN!

LUMME!
WHAT A PASTING
THE RAFF BLOKES
GAVE 'EM!



AS THE SOLDIERS STORMED INTO THE ENEMY'S DEFENCES, RIP JACKSON NEATLY FLIPPED HIS PLANE INTO POSITION AT BILL HUNTER'S WING TIP.

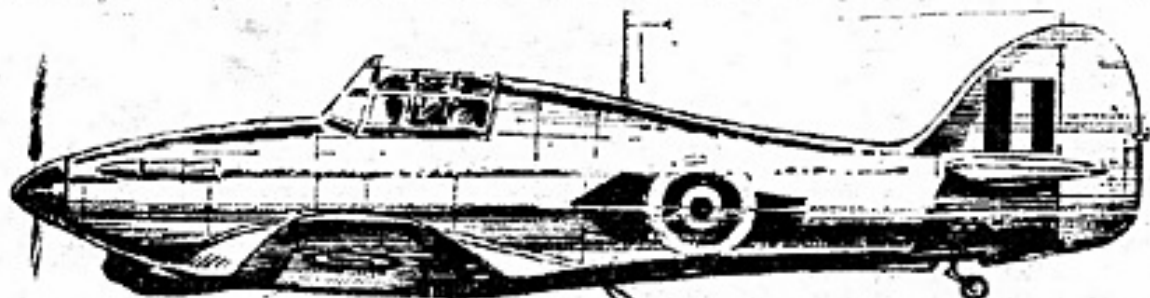
HELLO,
RED LEADER. THAT WAS
SHORT AND SWEET, BILL.
SEEMS A PITY TO TAKE
ALL THIS AMMO BACK
THOUGH.

WE DID
ALL THAT WAS
REQUIRED, RIP...
THAT BATTERY WON'T
FIRE AGAIN!



THE TWO HURRICANES CIRCLED SOUTH OVER A BARREN, DESOLATE LANDSCAPE TOWARDS THEIR DISTANT BASE. SUDDENLY, RIP JACKSON GAVE AN EXCITED SHOUT OVER THE RADIO...

HEY, BILL,
I'LL SWEAR
I SAW SOME
MOVEMENT
DOWN THERE
ON OUR RIGHT.
I'LL HAVE A
CLOSER LOOK.



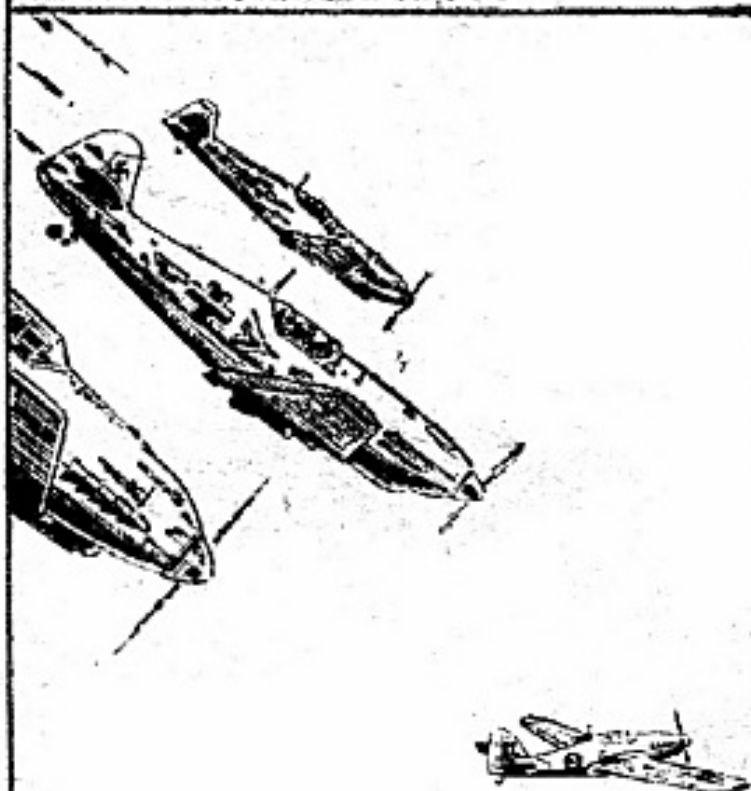
NONSENSE, RIP!
WE'RE WELL OFF THE
BEATEN TRACK. MUST HAVE
BEEN A MIRAGE,
YOU CHUMP!



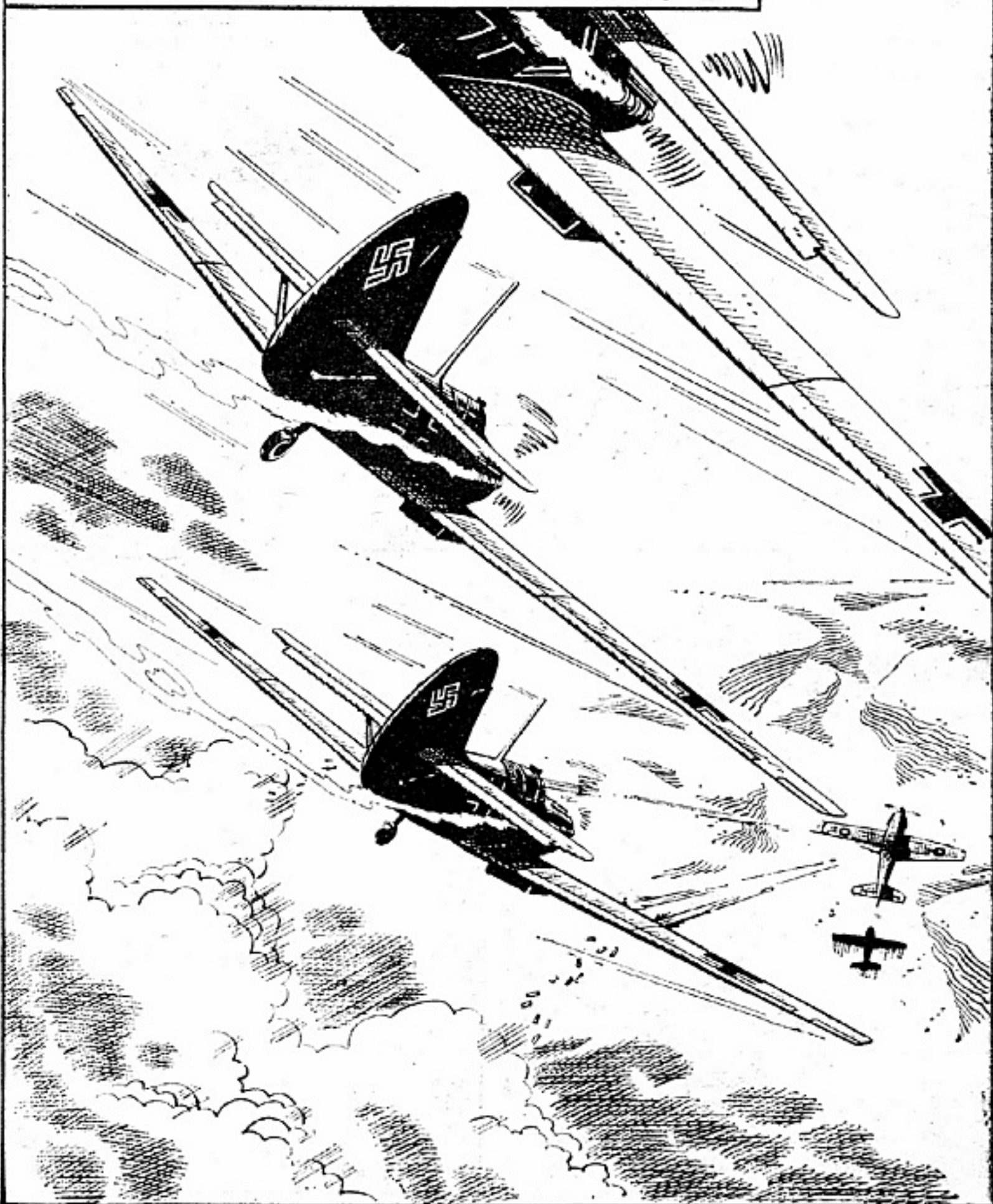
BILL GRINNED TO HIMSELF AS HIS IMPETUOUS FRIEND SWOOPED TOWARDS THE GROUND...
THEN...

GREAT
HEAVENS! LOOK OUT,
RIP—RIP! JERRIES
DIVING ON YOU!

LIKE GREEDY HAWKS, THREE BLACK-CROSSED MESSERSCHMITT 109'S PLUMMETED FROM THE LOW CLOUDS TOWARDS THE UNWARY RIP JACKSON'S HURRICANE...



AT HIS LEADER'S FRANTIC, WARNING CRY, RIP FLUNG HIS PLANE
UP AND SIDWAYS . . . *BUT IT WAS TOO LATE!*

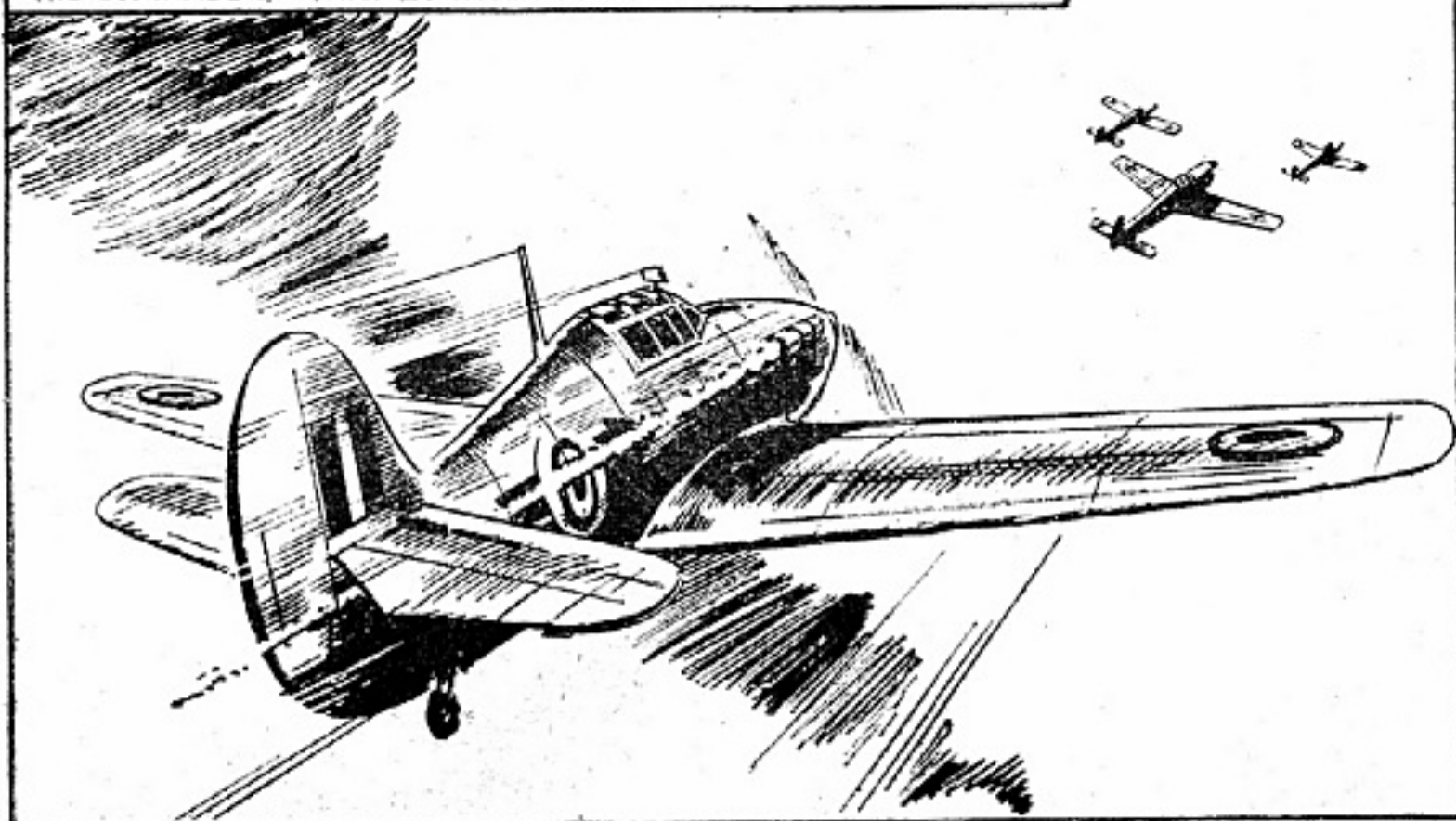


ITS MOTOR STREAMING FLAMES AND SMOKE, ITS TAILPLANE ALMOST SLICED FROM THE FUSELAGE BY THE ENEMY'S BULLETS, RIP JACKSON'S HURRICANE FLUTTERED EARTHWARDS LIKE A MORTALLY WOUNDED BIRD...



BILL... BILL...
YOUR... MISTAKE...
ENEMY... AAGH!

HIS MIND NUMBED WITH SHOCK, BILL HUNTER'S FLYING INSTINCT SENT HIS PLANE LANCING TOWARDS THE ENEMY EVEN AS HIS COMRADE'S STRICKEN HURRICANE HIT THE GROUND...



THROUGH A RED
HAZE OF RAGE ...
BITTER RAGE
AT HIMSELF FOR
NOT HAVING
SEEN THE ENEMY
FIGHTERS ...
BILL SAW A
MESSERSCHMITT
FRAMED IN
HIS SIGHTS .

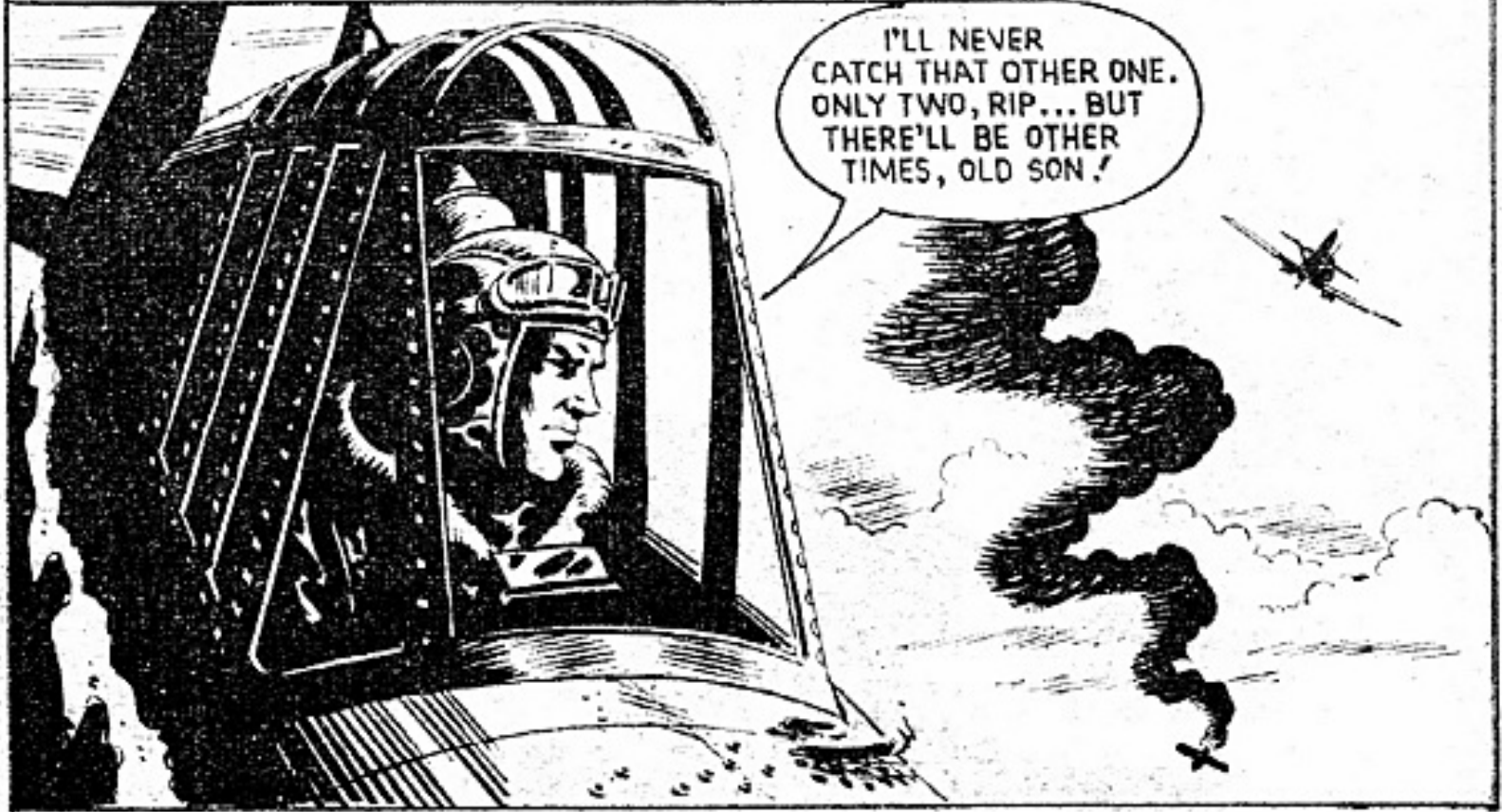
YOU ... YOU
CUNNING DEMONS !
RIP WAS WORTH
ALL THREE OF YOU !

SHATTERED BY A HAIL OF BULLETS, THE MESSERSCHMITT SEEMED TO FALL OUT OF THE SKY.
ENGINE SCREAMING, THE HURRICANE CLAWED ITS WAY UPWARDS TOWARDS A SECOND GERMAN,
REGARDLESS OF THE MENACE OF THE OTHER ENEMY PLANE .

NOTHING'S GOING
TO STOP ME FROM
PAYING OFF RIP'S
LOSS !

BILL HUNTER'S FIRE HIT THE GERMAN DEVASTATINGLY BEFORE HE EVEN KNEW HE WAS IN DANGER. RECKLESSLY THE SQUADRON LEADER HAD PRESSED HOME HIS ATTACK, DESPITE THE BATTERING HIS PLANE WAS TAKING FROM THE THIRD MESSERSCHMITT.


I'LL NEVER
CATCH THAT OTHER ONE.
ONLY TWO, RIP... BUT
THERE'LL BE OTHER
TIMES, OLD SON!



SOON, SQUADRON LEADER BILL HUNTER'S BULLET-RIDDLED HURRICANE BUMPED TO A HALT ON THE AIRFIELD, WATCHED BY A GROUP OF PUZZLED PILOTS.

THE SKIPPER'S
BEEN IN A SCRAP,
FROM THE LOOK
OF IT!

BUT... BUT WHERE'S RIP? THEY NEVER
RETURN WITHOUT EACH OTHER...
SURELY HE HASN'T...



ONE LOOK AT THEIR COMMANDING OFFICER'S GRIM FACE TOLD THE PILOTS THAT THEIR FEARS WERE WELL FOUNDED.

IT'S NOT RIP, SKIPPER, IS IT?

RIP WAS JUMPED BY THREE M.E.'S... HE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE!

WE'RE SORRY, BILL. THE SQUADRON'S NOT GOING TO BE THE SAME WITHOUT THAT HAREBRAIN AROUND.

STERN AND UNSMILING, BILL HUNTER TRUDGED MISERABLY TOWARDS HIS TENT... RIP JACKSON'S LAST WORDS POUNDING THROUGH HIS HEAD.

"BILL... YOUR... MISTAKE... WITH HIS LAST WORDS RIP TOLD ME IT WAS MY FAULT! AND HE WAS RIGHT! I SHOULD HAVE COVERED HIM."

FOR BILL, THAT NIGHT SEEMED ENDLESS, AND WHILE HE TOSSED AND TURNED ON HIS CAMP BED, HAUNTED BY THE SIGHT OF RIP'S FALLING PLANE... THE BATTLE FOR THE DESERT WAS CHANGING. THE CREWS OF BRITISH TANKS WERE AROUSED FROM THEIR SLEEP BY CRIES OF ALARM.

MAN YOUR GUNS!
JERRY TANKS
COMING!

IN A NIGHT ATTACK, ROMMEL'S HEAVY ARMOUR SURPRISED AND SMASHED THE 4TH. ARMoured BRIGADE.



DAWN FOUND THE EIGHTH ARMY'S TANK STRENGTH SADLY DEPLETED AND DISORGANISED. THE ENEMY'S PANZER DIVISION BECAME NUMBER ONE TARGET FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE.

THIS RECCE PHOTO SHOWS EIGHTY GERMAN TANKS DISPERSED IN THIS AREA AT DAWN TODAY. BRIGADE REQUESTS A BOMBING ATTACK, BARCLAY, BEFORE THEY CAN GET ON THE MOVE. CAN DO, OLD CHAP?



CERTAINLY. GIVE ME THE POSITION, JOHN, AND I'LL GET OUR BLOKES ON THE JOB.

BILL HUNTER'S HURRIBOMBER SQUADRON WAS DETAILED FOR THE MISSION AND AT THE BRIEFING, HE SURPRISED HIS MEN WITH HIS ORDERS FOR THE ATTACK.

WE STRIKE FROM THE SOUTH WEST AT ZERO FEET.



ZERO FEET? THAT'S A BIT DICEY, SKIPPER, ISN'T IT? THE TANKS' MACHINE GUNS WILL GIVE US A TIDY PASTING, AND THEY'RE SURE TO HAVE QUITE A BIT OF LIGHT FLAK ABOUT.

THE SQUADRON LEADER'S REPLY WAS SHARP AND UNCOMPROMISING.

ZERO FEET, I SAID! I DON'T WANT ONE BOMB TO MISS ITS TARGET. ANY OTHER COMPLAINTS?



NO, SIR. WHAT YOU SAY GOES, OF COURSE.

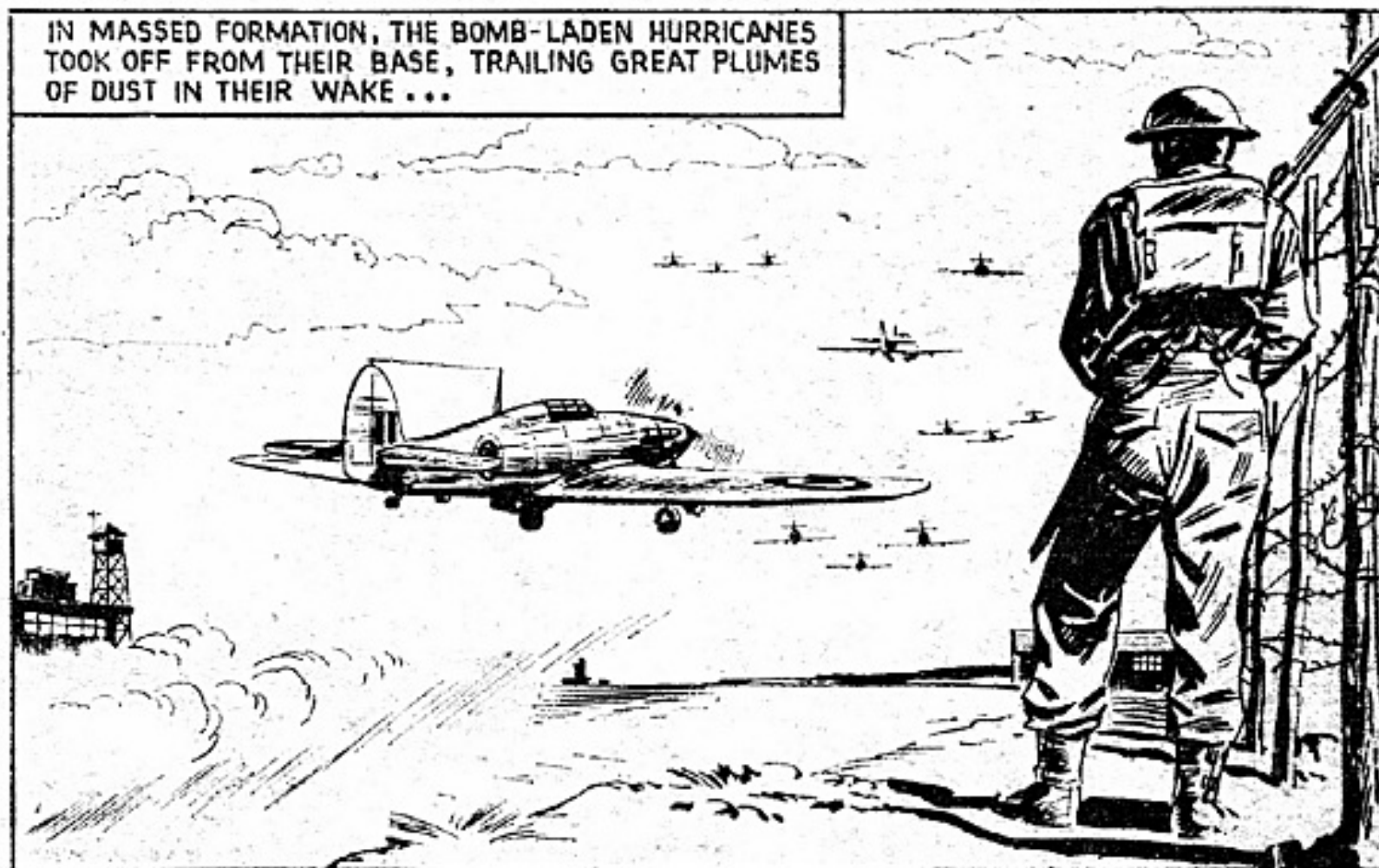
THERE WAS AN UNEASY TENSION IN THE AIR AS THE PILOTS FOLLOWED THEIR COMMANDING OFFICER TO THE TRUCKS WHICH WOULD TAKE THEM TO THEIR DISPERSED AIRCRAFT.

IT'S NOT LIKE THE SKIPPER TO TAKE ANY UNNECESSARY RISKS LIKE THIS.

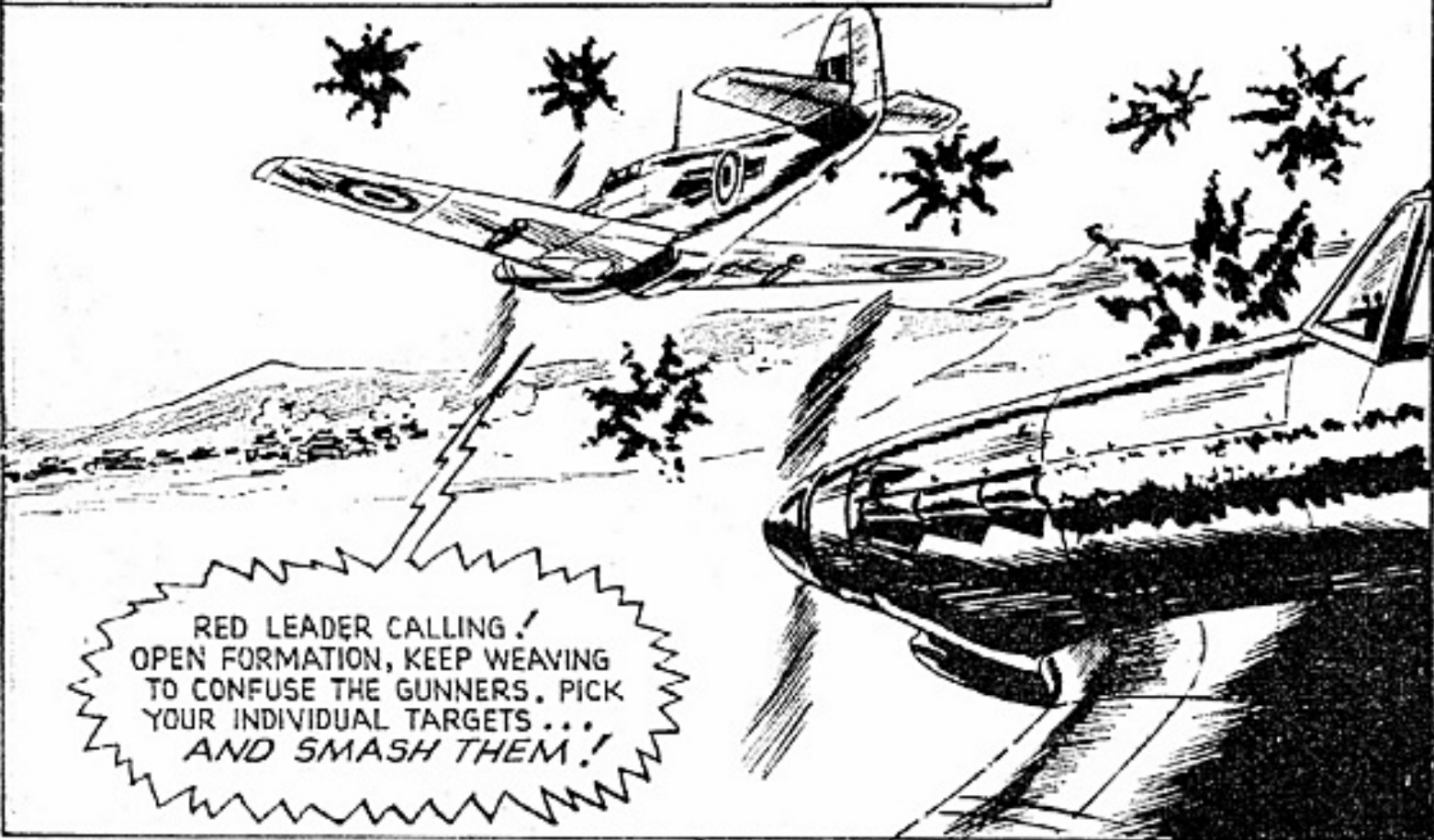
I THINK RIP'S LOSS HAS HIT HIM PRETTY HARD. HE WANTS TO TAKE IT OUT ON THE JERRIES.



IN MASSED FORMATION, THE BOMB-LADEN HURRICANES TOOK OFF FROM THEIR BASE, TRAILING GREAT PLUMES OF DUST IN THEIR WAKE...

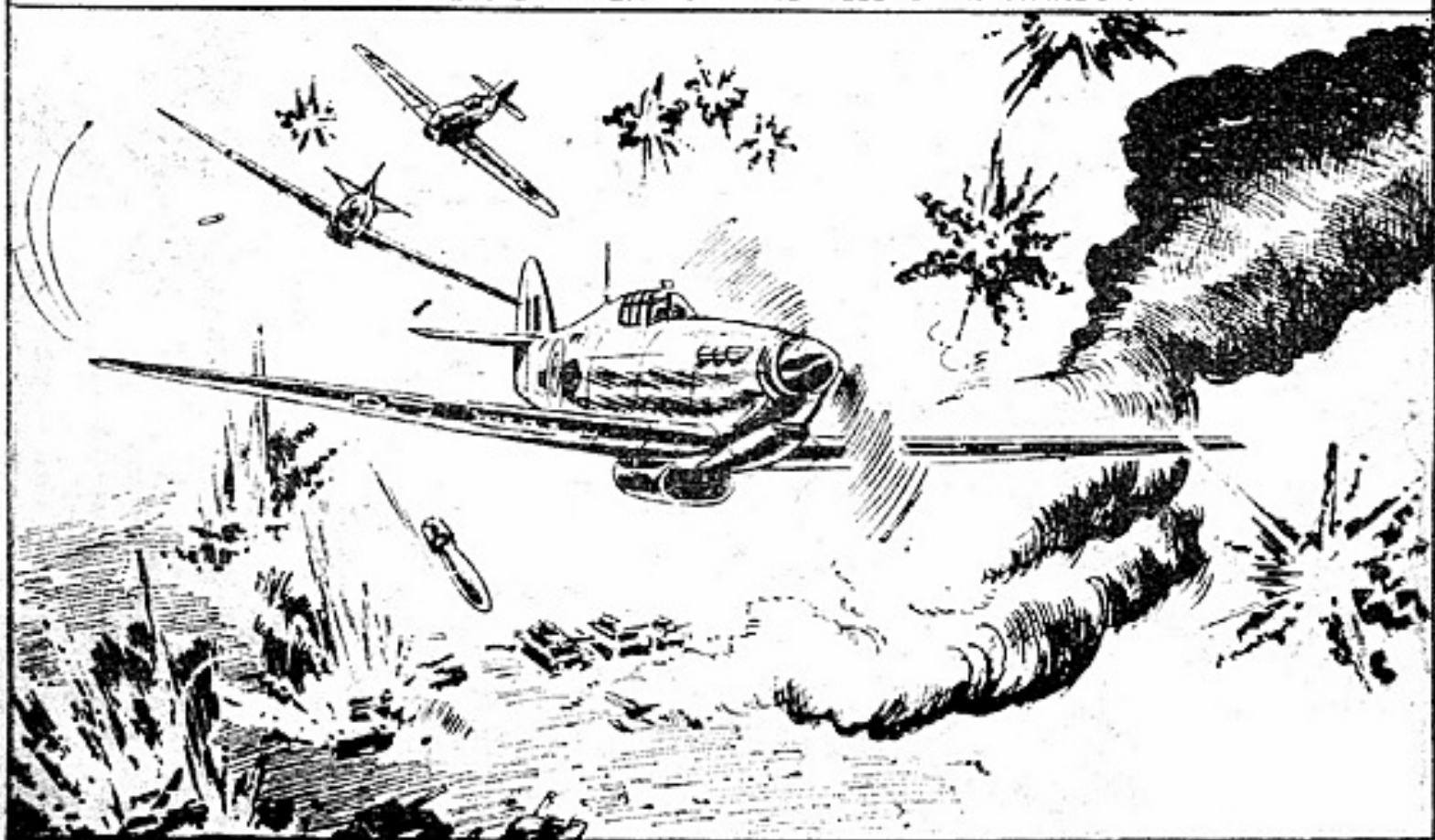


AS THEY APPROACHED THEIR TARGET, THE ALERT GERMAN DEFENCES SENT A DEADLY BARRAGE OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE TO MEET THEM.



RED LEADER CALLING!
OPEN FORMATION, KEEP WEAVING
TO CONFUSE THE GUNNERS. PICK
YOUR INDIVIDUAL TARGETS...
AND SMASH THEM!

THROUGH A CURTAIN OF FLYING STEEL FRAGMENTS, THE LITTLE FIGHTERS BORE BRAVELY
IN TO THE ATTACK... AND BOMB AFTER BOMB HURTTLED DOWNWARDS.



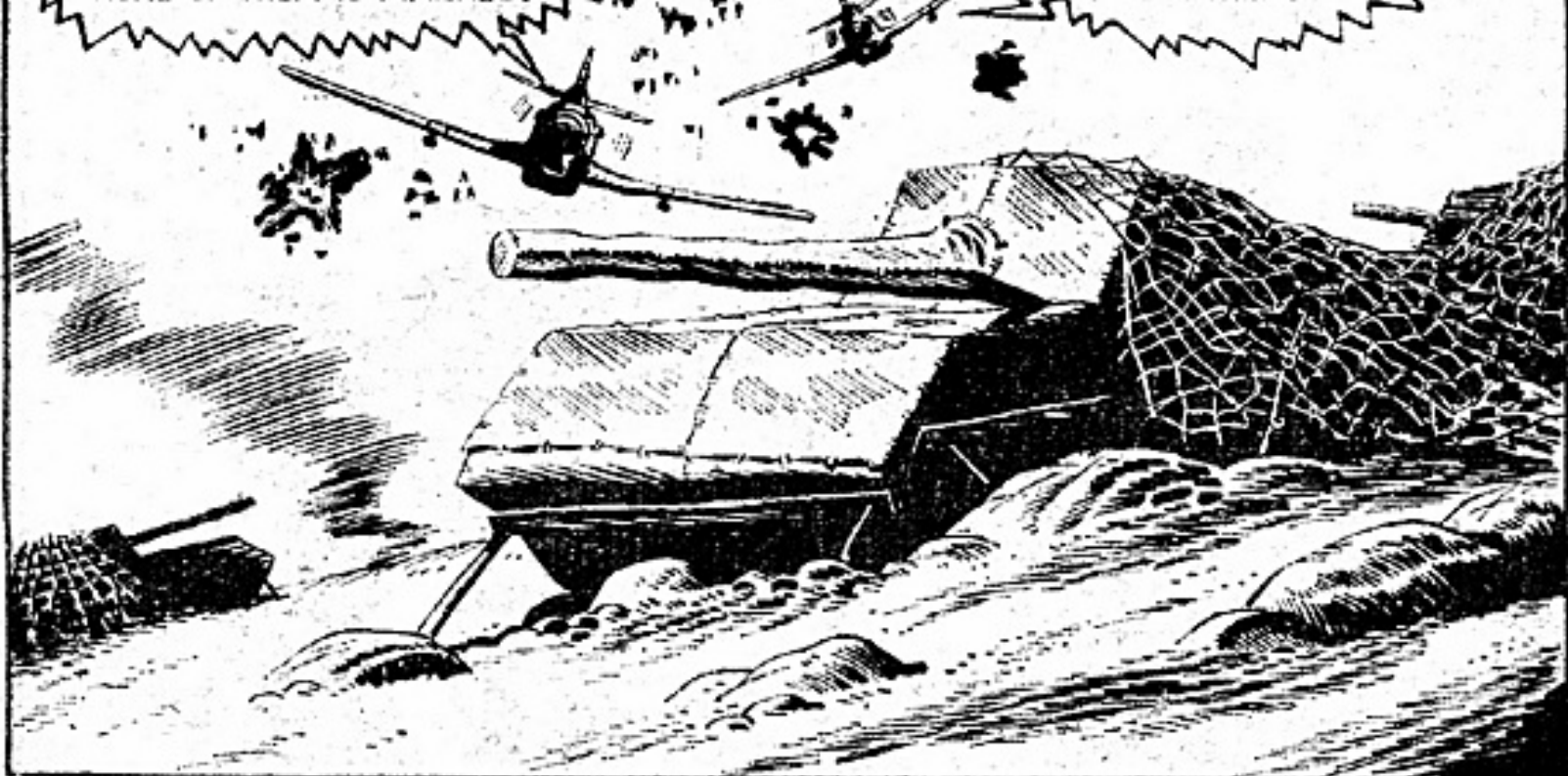
WITH PIN-POINT ACCURACY, THE BOMBS STRUCK THEIR TARGETS...
DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF THE GERMAN GUNNERS.



THEN A STRANGE DOUBT STRUCK ONE OR TWO OF THE BRITISH PILOTS.

RED FOUR TO RED LEADER.
THERE'S SOMETHING FISHY
ABOUT THOSE TANKS, SKIPPER.
NONE OF THEM IS MANNED!

SOMEHOW THEY
DON'T LOOK RIGHT,
EITHER.



IN A TIGHT, VERTICAL TURN, BILL HUNTER
CIRCLED A GROUP OF THE WRECKED TANKS...

RED LEADER CALLING RED FOUR.
YOU'RE DEAD RIGHT... WE'VE
BEEN HOAXED! *THEY'RE
DUMMIES!*



Chapter 2. **ARMoured COLUMN**

AT CORPS HEADQUARTERS, REPORTS WERE COMING IN FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE WIDE-FLUNG DESERT BATTLEFIELD. MOST DISTURBING OF THESE WAS THE NEWS RECEIVED FROM SQUADRON LEADER HUNTER.

SIR, THE FIGHTER BOMBER C.O. WHO STRAFED THE TANKS NORTH OF BIR EL GUBI REPORTS EVERY TANK WAS A DUMMY.

WHAT? EIGHTY GERMAN TANKS LOOSE... AND WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE? THEIR MOVEMENTS COULD DECIDE THE WHOLE BATTLE!



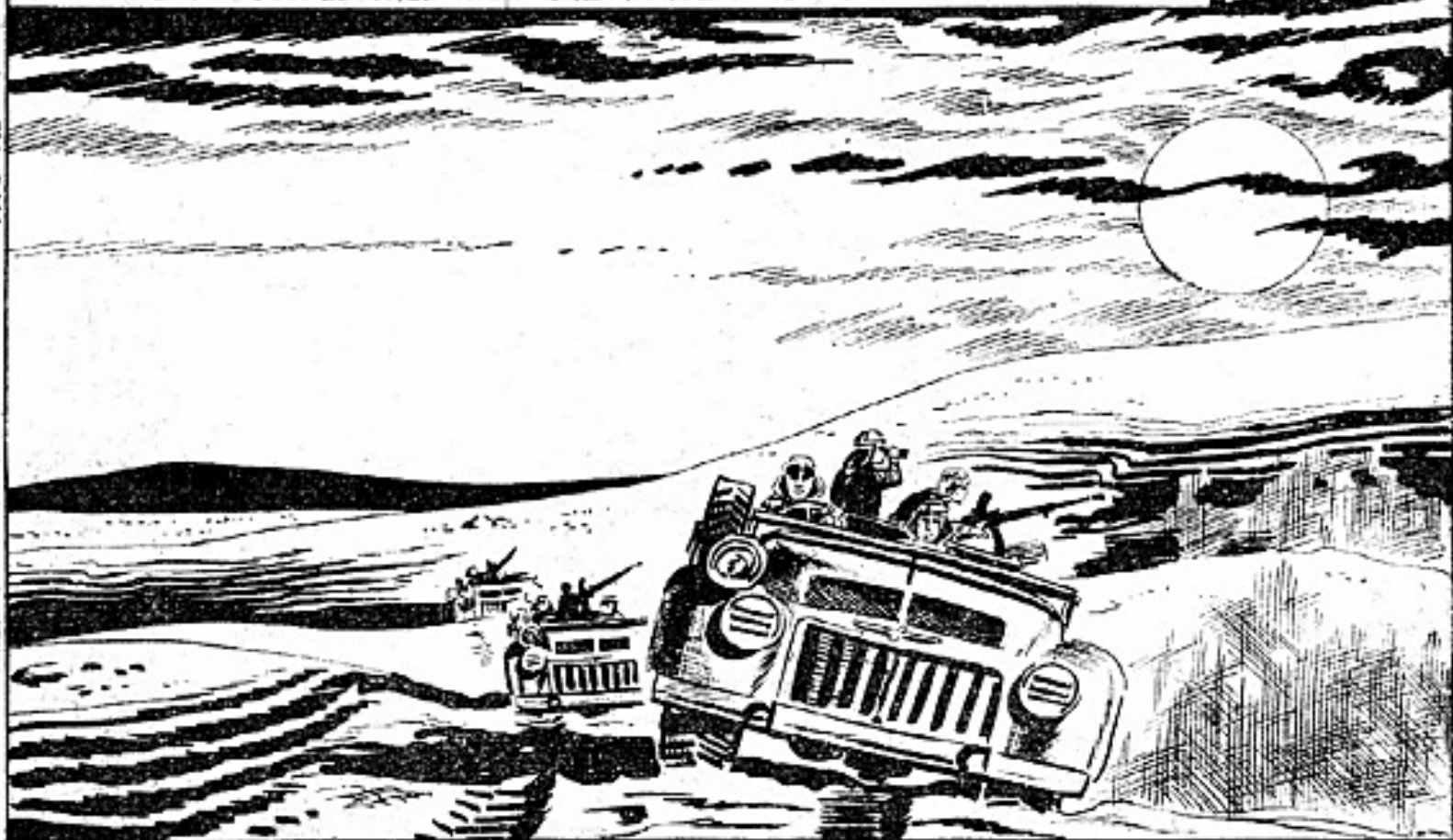
ONE GLANCE AT THE MAP CONFIRMED THE STAFF OFFICER'S WORDS.

SEE... IF THEY'VE HEADED NORTH, THEY WILL MENACE THE WHOLE OF THE TOBRUK SALIENT ... IT'S VULNERABLE ENOUGH!

... AND IF THEY'RE MOVING EAST, OUR FORWARD LINES ARE IN DANGER! THERE'S A LONG-RANGE DESERT GROUP OPERATING IN THAT AREA, SIR. I SUGGEST THEY BE ORDERED TO FIND OUT WHERE THE TANKS HAVE GONE.



BENEATH THE GREAT STARLIT VAULT OF THE NIGHT SKY, THE LONG-RANGE DESERT GROUP PICKED THEIR WAY UNERRINGLY TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVE.



CONCEALING THEIR VEHICLES IN A WADI, A DRIED UP RIVER BED, THEY PREPARED TO PROBE THE SECRETS OF THE GERMANS' TANK GROUND.

WE'RE NOW HALF A MILE FROM JERRY'S TANKS. SERGEANT MORRIS, TAKE FOUR MEN AND SEARCH THE AREA TO THE NORTH. THE OTHERS WILL COME WITH ME AND WE'LL COVER THE SOUTHERN PART. TWO MEN WILL STAY WITH THE TRUCKS.



LIEUTENANT BOB SHARP, COMMANDING THE GROUP, LAID SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON HIS NEXT WORDS.

QUIETLY DOES IT, CHAPS!
WE MUSTN'T BE SEEN... AND WE
MUST GET OUR INFORMATION BACK!
OKAY... OFF YOU GO, SERGEANT.



LIKE DRIFTING SHADOWS, SERGEANT MORRIS AND HIS MEN EXPLORED THE ENEMY'S LINES. NOT A TANK DID THEY FIND... BUT THERE WERE MANY SHATTERED OR GUTTED WRECKS OF DUMMY WOODEN TANKS, STARK EVIDENCE OF THE ACCURACY OF BILL HUNTER'S HURRIBOMBER RAID.

THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT... JERRY'S MOVED OUT ALL RIGHT.

HEY, SARGE! THERE ARE TANK TRACKS HERE... HEADING EAST IS MY GUESS. SOME DAYS OLD, THOUGH.



THE YOUNG OFFICER'S PARTY CONFIRMED THE TROOPER'S ESTIMATE.

GET IN TOUCH WITH H.Q., SERGEANT. TELL THEM WHAT WE'VE FOUND AND SAY WE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO FOLLOW THE TRACKS.

RIGHT, SIR. IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY, THOUGH. THE HEAVY RAINS WILL HAVE WASHED AWAY A LOT OF THE TRAIL.



NOVEMBER 23RD. DAWNED CLEAR AND DRY. THE LANDING GROUNDS OF THE LUFTWAFFE HAD DRIED OUT, AND IT NEEDED A MAXIMUM EFFORT FROM THE R.A.F. FIGHTERS AND BOMBERS TO KEEP THE HUNGRY GERMAN AIRCRAFT FROM THE THROATS OF THE EIGHTH ARMY. WORKING THROUGH THE LONG NIGHT HOURS, THE GROUND CREWS OF BILL HUNTER'S SQUADRON HAD SERVICED AND REPAIRED THE BATTERED HURRICANES.

SHE'S OKAY FOR TESTING, SIR... ALL PATCHED UP AFTER THE BASHING SHE TOOK YESTERDAY. I WONDER IF YOU'D EXCUSE ME IF I SAID SOMETHING PERSONAL SIR?

FIRE AWAY, SMITHY... YOU'VE BEEN WITH ME LONG ENOUGH TO SPEAK YOUR MIND!

CORPORAL JOE SMITH, ONE OF THE BEST FITTERS IN THE SQUADRON, WHO HAD ALWAYS TAKEN AN ALMOST FATHERLY INTEREST IN THE AFFAIRS OF HIS C.O. AND YOUNG LIEUTENANT JACKSON, TOOK A DEEP BREATH...

IT'S ABOUT YOU AND MISTER JACKSON, SIR. YOU'VE BEEN BLAMING YOURSELF ABOUT HIS DEATH, SIR... AND THERE'S ONE THING I'M CERTAIN OF... MISTER RIP WOULD NEVER HAVE BLAMED YOU, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED. HE WASN'T LIKE THAT. HE CERTAINLY WOULDN'T HAVE WANTED YOU TO TAKE THE RISKS YOU'VE BEEN TAKING.

YOU KNOW, SMITHY... I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. BUT IT'S VERY STRANGE... HIS LAST WORDS SEEMED TO...

BILL PAUSED, REMEMBERING HIS FRIEND'S LAST ACCUSING MESSAGE, AND THEN, WITH A SHRUG OF HIS BROAD SHOULDERS, HE SEEMED TO THROW OFF HIS SOMBRE MOOD.

I'LL TAKE THE OLD BUS UP TO TRY HER OUT... MAYBE IT'LL CLEAR MY HEAD, TOO. SMITHY... THANKS FOR THOSE FEW WORDS. I NEEDED THEM BADLY.

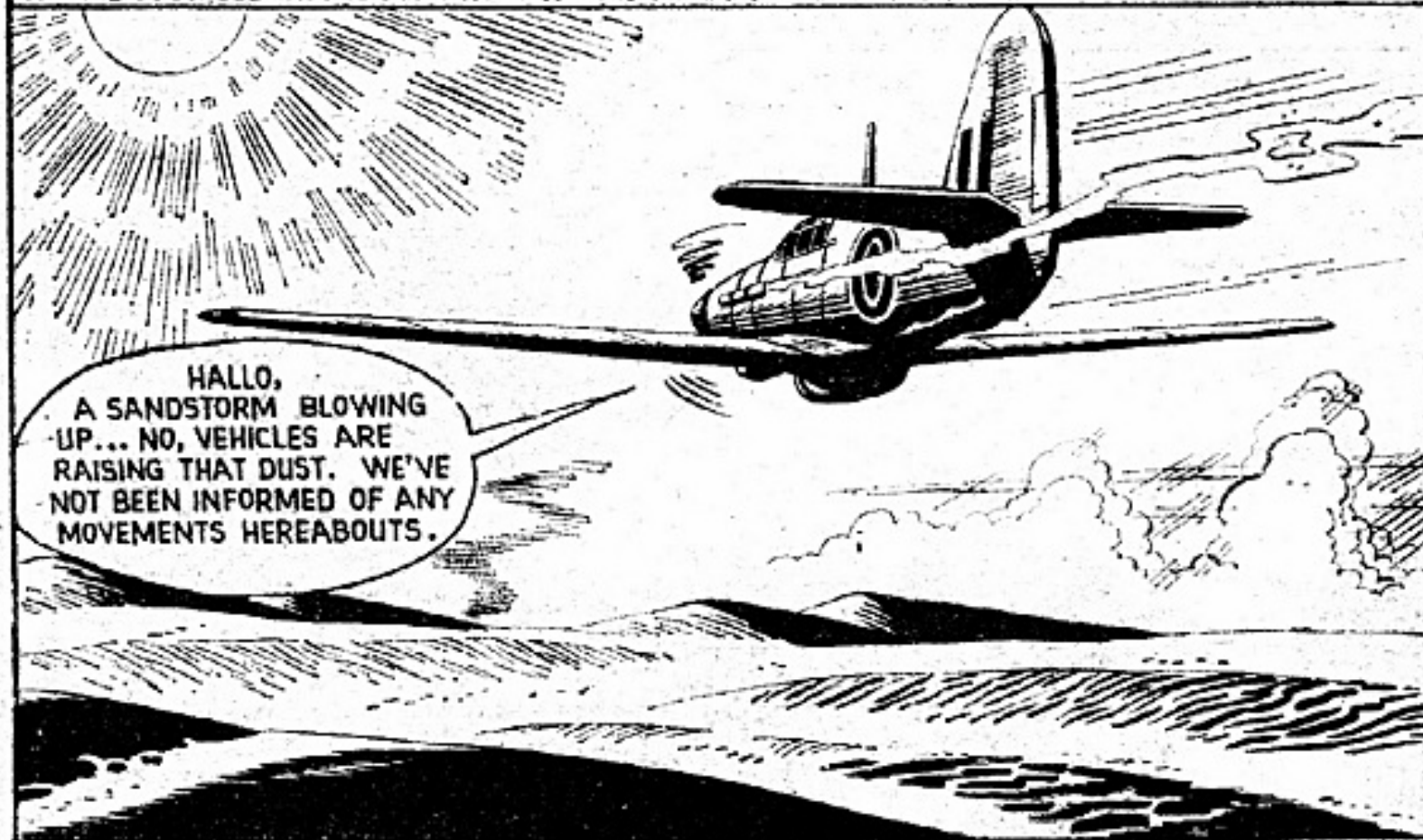


HIGH OVER THE DESERT A DEEP FEELING OF PEACE CREPT OVER BILL HUNTER, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME FOR DAYS HE SEEMED TO SEE THINGS CLEARLY. RIP WAS GONE AND NOTHING COULD BRING HIS FRIEND BACK. HE MUST THINK OF THE LIVING... THE MEN UNDER HIS COMMAND.



I OWE IT TO THE LADS TO PULL MYSELF TOGETHER... WE'VE GOT A TOUGH JOB TO DO, WITHOUT ME MAKING THINGS MORE DIFFICULT.

NOT FOR A MOMENT DURING HIS FLIGHT HAD THE EXPERIENCED DESERT PILOT RELAXED HIS VIGILANCE... AND JUST BELOW THE DISTANT HORIZON, A THIN, RISING TRAIL OF DUST CAUGHT HIS EYE.



HALLO,
A SANDSTORM BLOWING
UP... NO, VEHICLES ARE
RAISING THAT DUST. WE'VE
NOT BEEN INFORMED OF ANY
MOVEMENTS HEREBOUTS.

LIKE A WINGED DART, THE FIGHTER PLANE DIVED TOWARDS THE DUST CLOUD ... AND IN SECONDS, THE VEHICLES CAUSING IT BECAME CLEARLY VISIBLE.


THUNDER! IT'S A JERRY ARMoured COLUMN!

INSTANTLY, BILL WRENCHED HIS PLANE ROUND IN A STEEP, CLIMBING TURN THAT ALMOST PULLED THE WINGS FROM THE STURDY LITTLE FIGHTER. BUT EVEN SO, A VICIOUS TORNADO OF LEAD SWEEPED UP AROUND HIM.

RED LEADER CALLING BASE ...
URGENT... ENEMY ARMoured COLUMN
STRIKING EAST! POSITION X-EIGHT FIVE
SCRAMBLE SQUADRON TO JOIN ME
HERE. OVER.

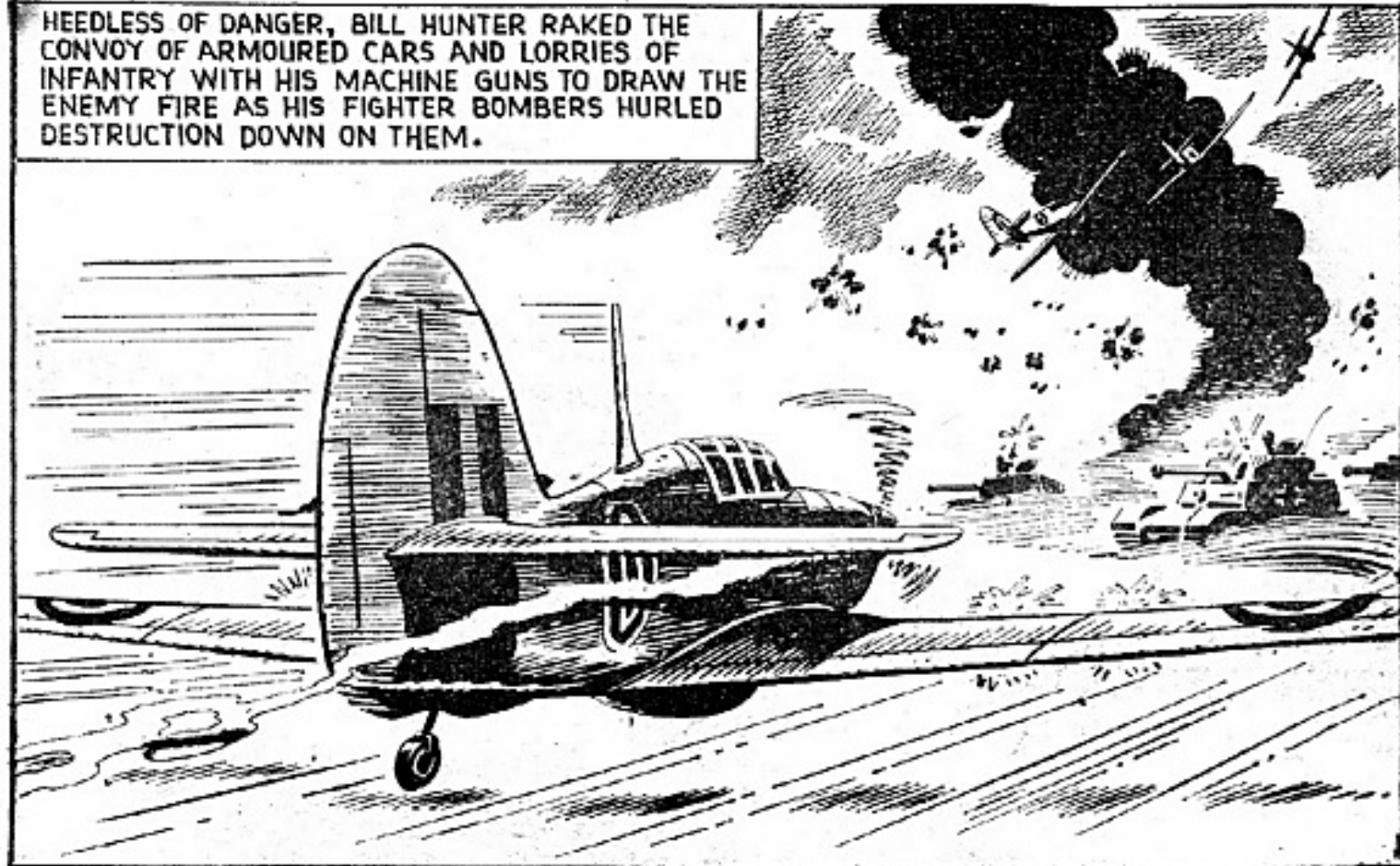
BASE TO RED
LEADER. MESSAGE
RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD.
SQUADRON BOMBED UP AND
SCRAMBLING ... NOW! OUT.

WHILE HE WAITED FOR HIS SQUADRON TO JOIN HIM, BILL HUNTER ESTIMATED THE DIRECTION OF THE ENEMY'S DARING THRUST. WITH ALARM HE REALISED THAT IT WAS AIMED PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF 30 CORPS AND THE GREAT SUPPLY DUMPS OF THE EIGHTH ARMY.



IF THEY HIT CORPS H.Q. OR THE DUMPS, THERE'LL BE REAL TROUBLE! WE'VE GOT TO DESTROY THAT COLUMN, OR TURN IT SOUTH.

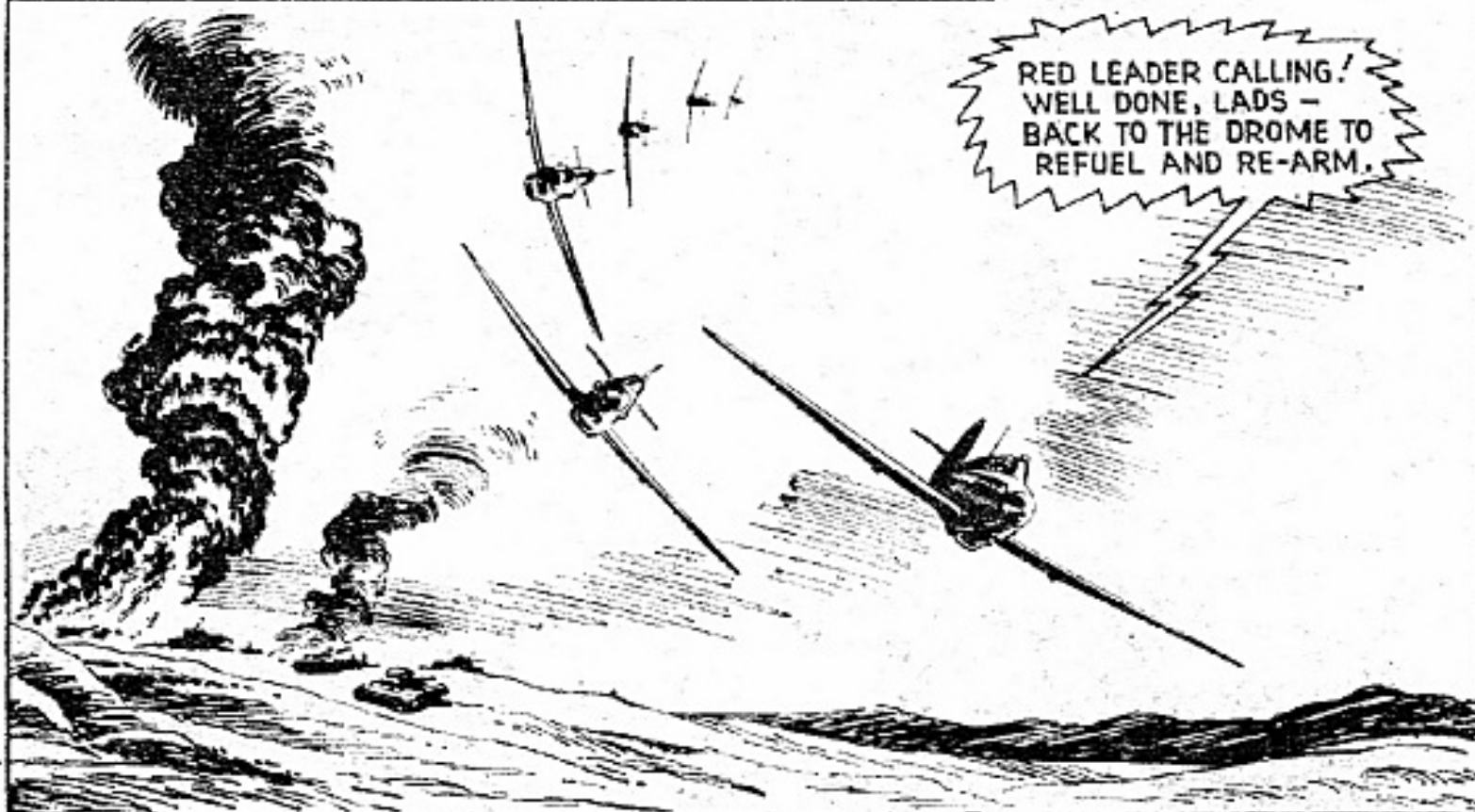
HEEDLESS OF DANGER, BILL HUNTER RAKED THE CONVOY OF ARMoured CARS AND LORRIES OF INFANTRY WITH HIS MACHINE GUNS TO DRAW THE ENEMY FIRE AS HIS FIGHTER BOMBERS HURLED DESTRUCTION DOWN ON THEM.



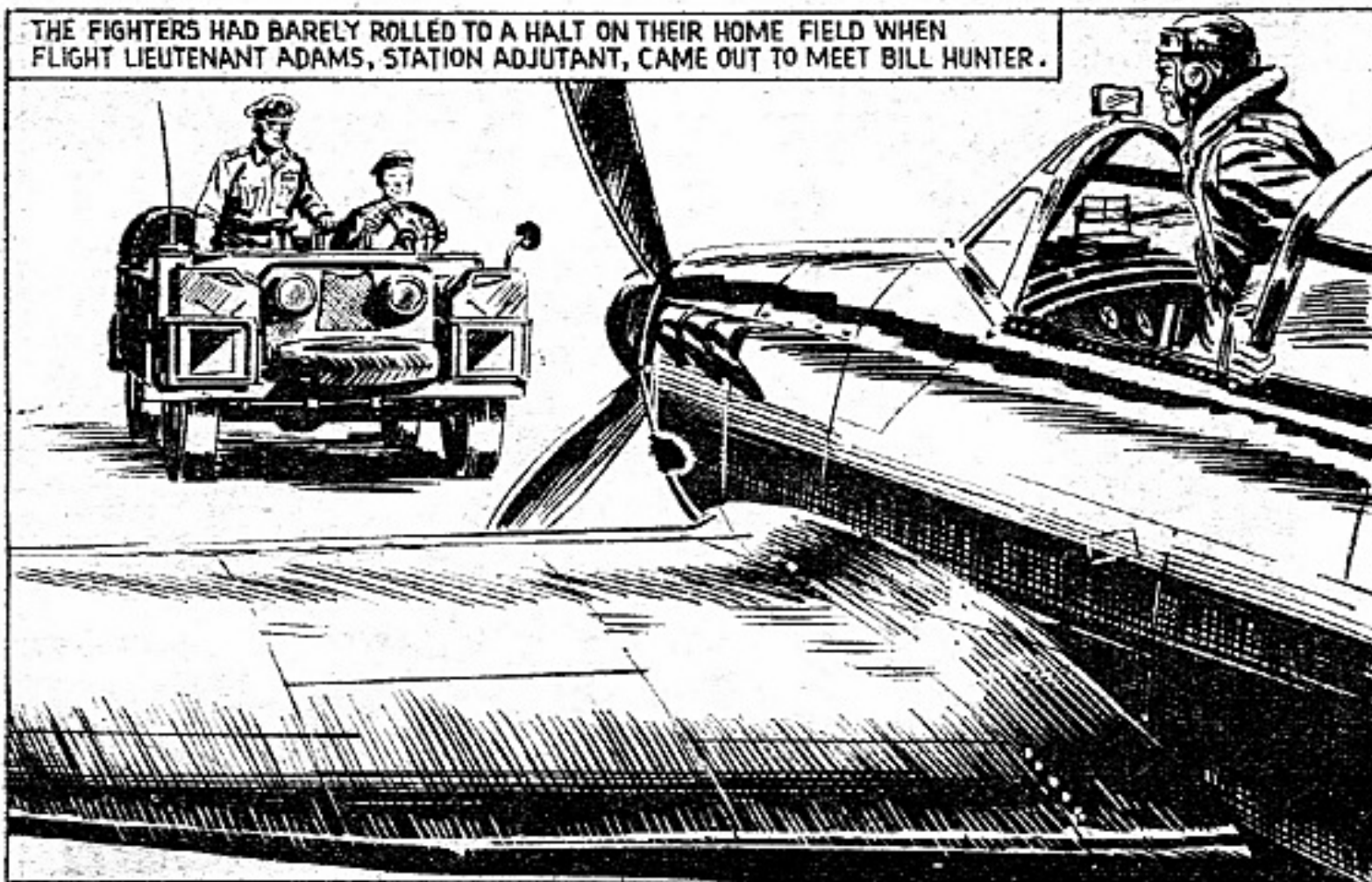
THE COLUMN WAS HIT HARD! BUT IT WAS ONLY THE VANGUARD
AND A STRONGER FORCE WAS CLOSE IN ITS TRACKS.



HOWEVER, THE HURRICANES HAD ACHIEVED THEIR OBJECTIVE, FOR ROMMEL'S ARMoured COLUMN VEERED SOUTH-EASTWARDS. BILL HUNTER AND HIS MEN HAD FENDED IT OFF WHILE REINFORCEMENTS WERE BEING RUSHED TO THE DANGER AREAS.



THE FIGHTERS HAD BARELY ROLLED TO A HALT ON THEIR HOME FIELD WHEN FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ADAMS, STATION ADJUTANT, CAME OUT TO MEET BILL HUNTER.



ADAMS SPOKE WITH A WORRIED NOTE OF URGENCY...

WE'VE GOT ORDERS TO MOVE BACK, SIR. THE ENEMY HAVE BROKEN THROUGH AT EL GUBI... YOU MUST HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THEIR FORWARD UNITS.

MOVE BACK? BUT THAT WOULD BE FATAL. I MUST HAVE A WORD WITH GROUP HEADQUARTERS.

BILL RAN TOWARDS THE WIRELESS TENT... AND THE ADJUTANT LOOKED AFTER HIM REFLECTIVELY.

THE SKIPPER'S HIS OLD SELF AGAIN... THAT'S FINE! I WONDER WHAT HE'S UP TO NOW?

BILL MUST HAVE SOUNDED VERY CONVINCING IN HIS TALK WITH GROUP HEADQUARTERS, FOR IN THREE MINUTES HE CAME TO THE DOOR, A CONFIDENT SMILE ON HIS SUN-TANNED FACE.

WE'RE MOVING ALL RIGHT - BUT NOT BACK. I'VE GOT PERMISSION TO TRANSFER THE SQUADRON TO ONE OF THE SMALL EMERGENCY DROMES SOUTH OF THE ABD TRACK. THE ENEMY WILL BE IN BETWEEN US AND OUR TROOPS. HOW SOON CAN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING ON THE TRANSPORT?

IN TWO HOURS, SIR.

THE ADJUTANT WAS BETTER THAN HIS WORD. IN ONE HOUR AND THREE QUARTERS THE SQUADRON WAS LINED UP IN CONVOY.

GIVE US FIVE HOURS TO REACH OUR NEW BASE, CHAPS... THEN FLY OFF. YOU KNOW THE POSITION. SEE YOU THERE... AND DON'T GET INTO TROUBLE ON THE WAY.

AND THE SAME TO YOU, SKIPPER.

WITH ARMoured CARS FANNING OUT ON EITHER SIDE TO GUARD THE FLANKS, THE TWO-MILE-LONG TRAIN OF VEHICLES BUCKED AND PLOUGHED THROUGH THE SANDS DEEPER INTO THE WESTERN DESERT.

VERY SOON WE'LL BE CROSSING THE PATH OF JERRY'S PUSH EASTWARDS. THAT'S GOING TO BE A TRICKY FEW MILES. IF WE'RE SEEN...



TWO MILES FARTHER ON, THE CONVOY CROSSED TRACKS THAT RAN FROM EAST TO WEST... THE TRACKS OF THE AFRIKA KORP'S DESPERATE THRUST AT THE HEART OF EGYPT. **THEN FATE STRUCK A CRUEL BLOW!**

PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT, LADS! WE'RE IN DEADLY DANGER HERE!

WE'RE DOING OUR BEST, SIR... IT'S BEGINNING TO MOVE.

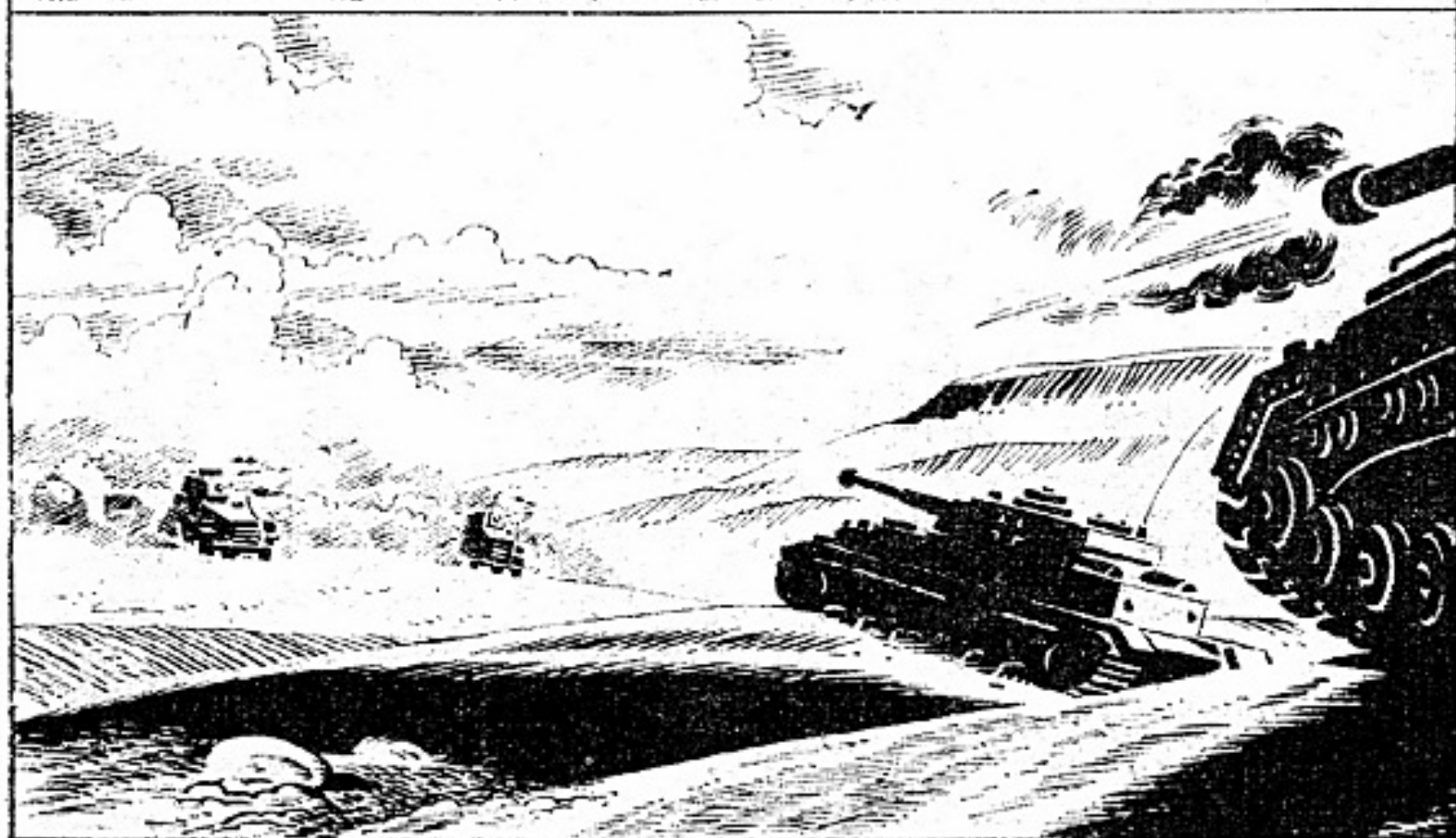
TO LEUTNANT ULRICH WASSEN, COMMANDING A TROOP OF TANKS PRESSING HARD ON THE HEELS OF THE VANGUARD OF ROMMEL'S MOBILE FORCES, THE SIGHT OF THE BRITISH LORRIES AND THE PUNY ARMoured CARS THAT ESCORTED THEM SEEMED LIKE A GIFT FROM THE GODS OF WAR.

BLITZEN! SOME EASY TARGET PRACTICE TO SHARPEN OUR AIM. SERGEANT, FOLLOW ME... THE REST OF YOU, CARRY ON. WE WILL SOON CATCH YOU UP.

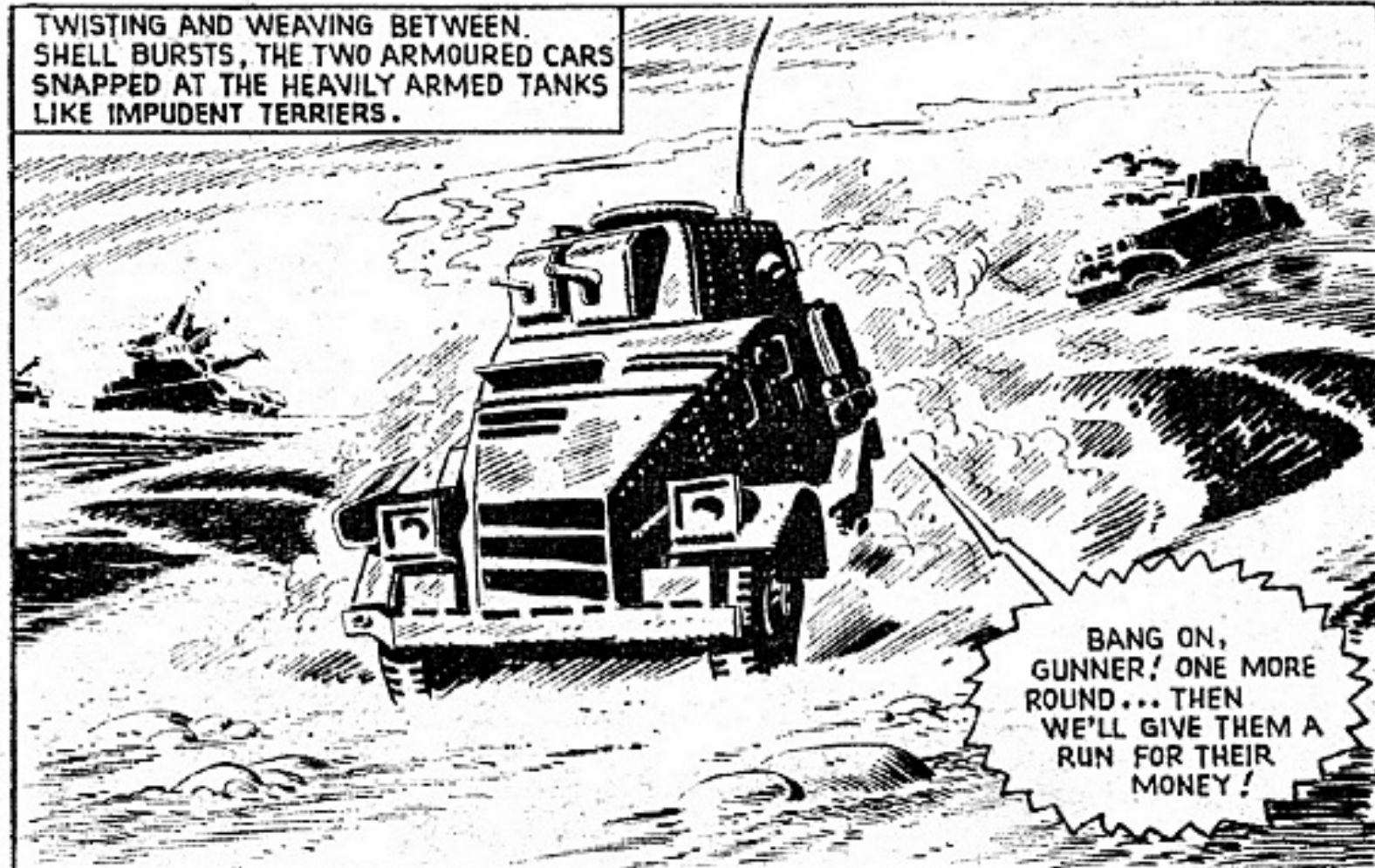
JA, MEIN LEUTNANT!




LIKE GREAT LUMBERING BEASTS OF PREY, THE GERMAN TANKS SWUNG MENACINGLY OFF THE TRACK... AND THE TWO R.A.F. ARMoured CARS TURNED TO MEET THEM.



TWISTING AND WEAVING BETWEEN SHELL BURSTS, THE TWO ARMoured CARS SNAPPED AT THE HEAVILY ARMED TANKS LIKE IMPUDENT TERRIERS.



THE ARMoured CARS' GALLANT ACTION HAD GIVEN THE THREE LORRIES ... AND THE REST OF THE CONVOY ... TIME TO GET OUT OF DANGER. BILL HUNTER THEN ORDERED THE OTHER CAR BY WIRELESS TO JOIN HIM IN A DASH FOR THE SANDSTONE RIDGE CLOSE BY,



HALLO,
ABLE FOX ... FOLLOW
ME CLOSELY AND DO
AS I DO.

BY NOW LEUTNANT WASSEN WAS ALMOST BOUNCING UP AND DOWN WITH RAGE AT THE WAY HIS ARMED SUPERIORITY HAD BEEN FLOUTED. AT HIS IMPATIENT ORDER, THE TANKS POUNDED AT FULL SPEED IN PURSUIT OF THE CARS WHICH WERE CRESTING THE RIDGE.



ENGINES ROARING, CATERPILLAR TRACKS CLAWING THE ROCKY GROUND, THE TWO GERMAN TANKS REACHED THE TOP OF THE HILL ... THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THEIR QUARRY ... THE GROUND AHEAD WAS CLEAR. PUZZLED, WASSEN CALLED A HALT ... AND HE COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT MORE CONVENIENTLY FOR BILL HUNTER.



AT THIRTY FEET, THE TWO-POUNDER GUNS OF THE ARMoured CARS BLEW THE HEAVY TURRETS ALMOST CLEAN OFF THE TANKS. TWO MORE ROUNDS ... AND THEY WERE BLAZING WRECKS.

CEASE FIRE!
THEY'VE HAD
ENOUGH!



TEN MINUTES LATER, THE TWO FAST CARS WERE RACING AFTER THE SQUADRON CONVOY ... AND A HIGH COLUMN OF SMOKE ON THE RIDGE TOLD OF THEIR DARING VICTORY.

LUMME! THE SKIPPER MUST HAVE
PUT PAID TO THOSE JERRY TANKS...
I THOUGHT OUR BLOKS
WERE GONERS!

AND
WE'RE JUST CATCHING
UP WITH THE REST OF
THE LADS.



AT LAST, WHITE WITH THE DUST OF DESERT TRAVEL, THE SQUADRON'S TRANSPORT REACHED THEIR NEW HOME ...

THIS IS IT, LADS! THE COOKS WILL HAVE
TEA, BULLY, AND BISCUITS READY IN
TWENTY MINUTES ...



Chapter 3. NIGHT RAID

THE TOBRUK SALIENT HAD MADE LITTLE PROGRESS AGAINST BITTER GERMAN RESISTANCE AND GENERAL FREYBURG'S NEW ZEALAND DIVISION, HAVING SEVERED THE ENEMY'S SUPPLY LINES TO HIS FRONTIER GARRISONS AROUND BARDIA, MOVED WESTWARDS IN AN EFFORT TO LINK UP WITH THE BELEAGUERED TROOPS THERE.



AND THOSE DEFENCES, WHEN REACHED, SEEMED ALMOST IMPREGNABLE, SUPPORTED AS THEY WERE BY HEAVY GERMAN ARMOUR.

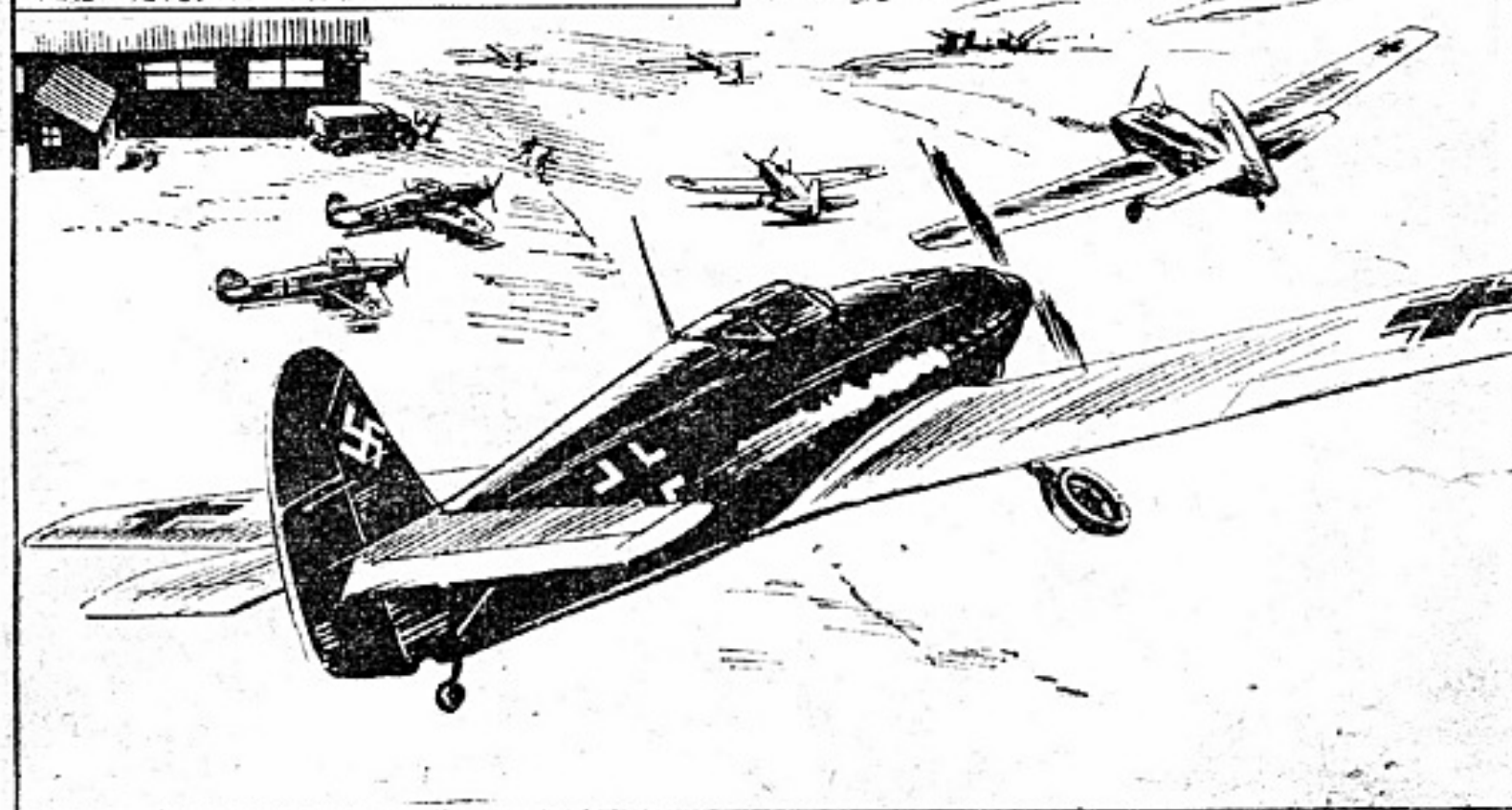


IN THE AIR, R.A.F. BLENHEIM LIGHT BOMBERS WERE AN UNEQUAL MATCH FOR FAST MESSERSCHMITT 109'S, FRESH FROM THEIR AIRFIELDS CLOSE BEHIND THE GERMAN LINE.

SOME OF THE BLIGHTERS HAVE TIED UP OUR FIGHTER ESCORT... AND THE OTHERS ARE PICKING US OFF!



AS THE BLENHEIMS TURNED FOR HOME, THE GERMAN FIGHTER PILOTS MADE FOR THEIR BASE IN GREAT FETTER... TO RE-ARM AND RETURN TO THE FRAY.



THE LAST FIGHTER TOUCHED DOWN ... THEN, FROM THE SOUTH, CAME A STEADILY MOUNTING ROAR OF MENACE. IN A MOMENT, ALARM AND PANIC SWEEPED THROUGH THE DROME ...

ACHTUNG!
ACHTUNG!

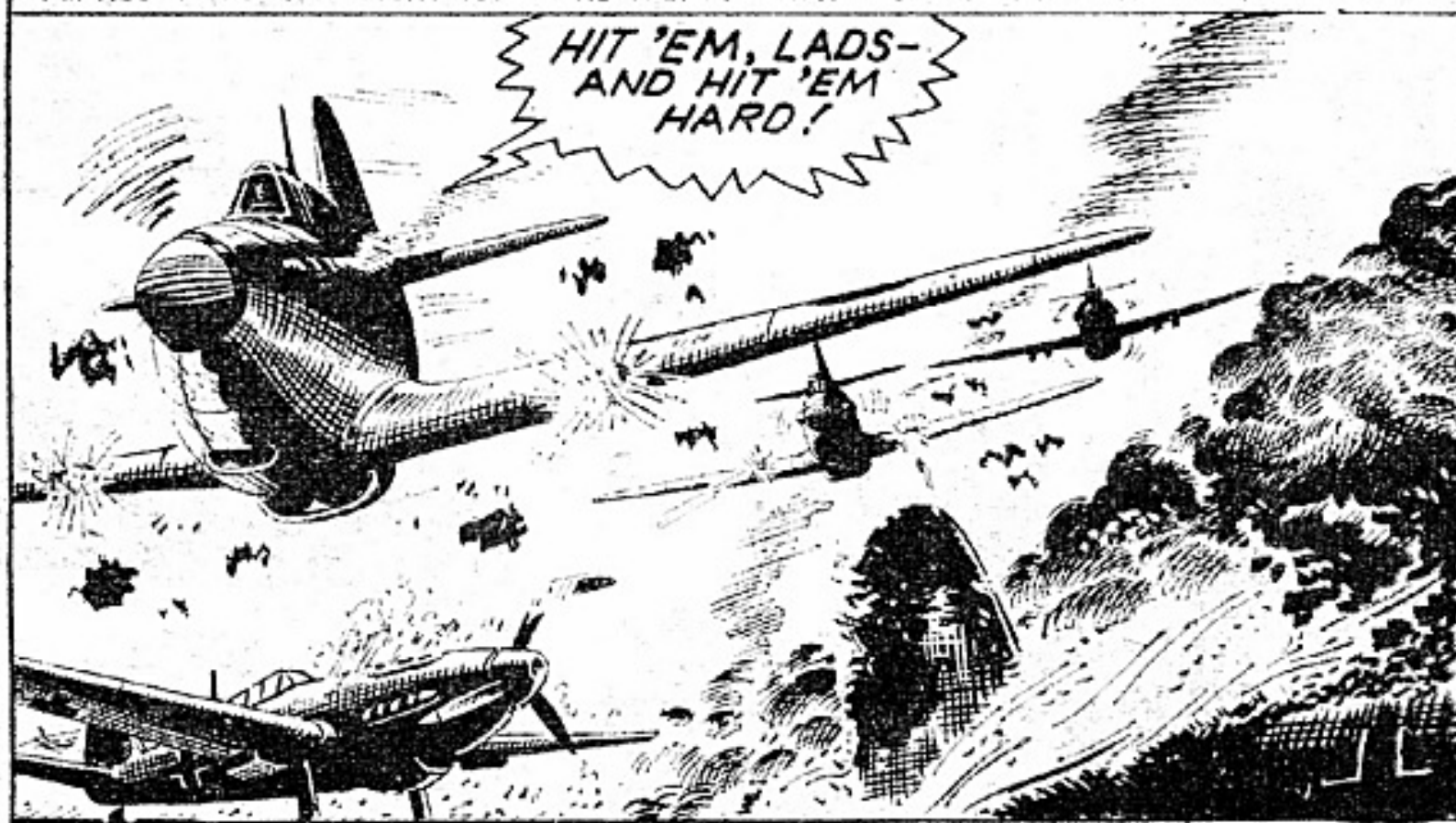


THE BELLOW OF THEIR MERLIN ENGINES FILLING THE SKY AND BATTERING AT THE EARDRUMS, BILL HUNTER'S HURRIBOMBERS SWEEP IN AT ZERO FEET...

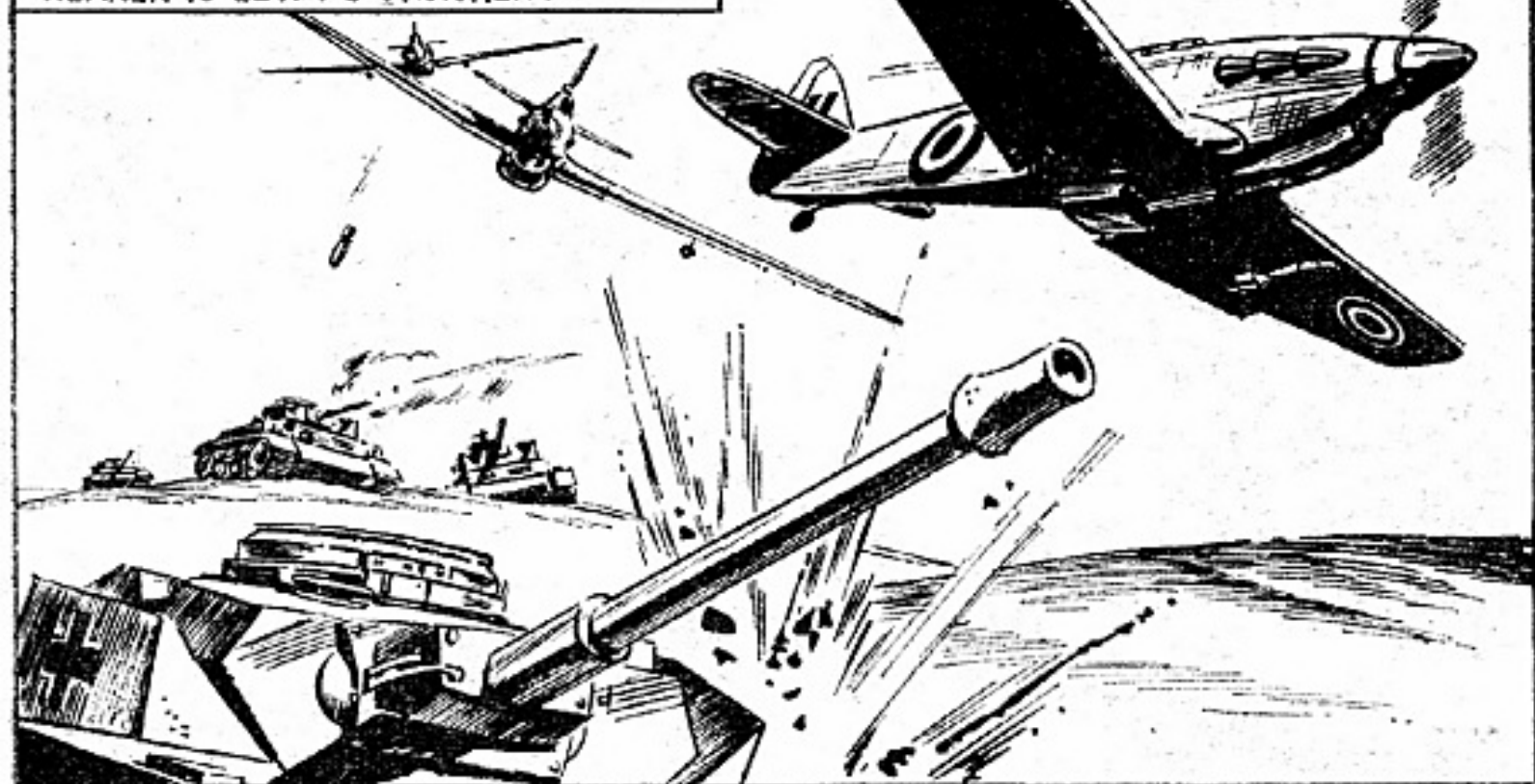


THE SURPRISE WAS COMPLETE AND DEVASTATING. SLEEK, DEADLY MESSERSCHMITT FIGHTERS WERE BLASTED INTO CRUMPLED, BURNING WRECKS BY THE BOMBS. THEN BILL LED HIS PLANES ROUND IN A TIGHT TURN AND THEIR MACHINE GUNS FOUND TARGETS A-PLenty.

HIT 'EM, LADS-
AND HIT 'EM
HARD!



THAT WAS THE FIRST OF MANY ATTACKS BY BILL HUNTER'S SQUADRON ON ENEMY AIRFIELDS AND UPON ROMMEL'S DRIVE WHICH WAS NOW MOVING IRRESISTIBLY NEARER TO EGYPT'S FRONTIER.



DESPITE INCESSANT ATTACKS FROM THE R.A.F., THE ENEMY ARMoured COLUMN PRESSED ON, EVER WESTWARDS. THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND REALISED ONLY TOO CLEARLY THAT WITH THIS ONE DARING STROKE THEY COULD REVERSE THE WHOLE OF BRITAIN'S OFFENSIVE IN THE DESERT.



FORWARD!
SOON EGYPT'S SANDS
WILL LIE BEFORE US AND THE
ENGLANDERS WILL BE CRUSHED
BY THE TRACKS OF OUR
MIGHTY PANZERS!

SORTIE AFTER SORTIE WAS FLOWN BY BILL HUNTER'S PLANES IN RESPONSE TO REQUESTS FROM AIR SUPPORT CONTROL, BUT FUEL AND AMMUNITION WERE RUNNING LOW.

ANY NEWS OF THE FUEL CONVOY WE URGENTLY REQUESTED, FRANK?

THERE'S A MESSAGE BEING DECIPHERED RIGHT NOW, SIR ...

BUT THE MESSAGE BORE ILL TIDINGS.


"FUEL CONVOY INTERCEPTED BY ENEMY COLUMN. THREE VEHICLES DESTROYED. WILL TRY TO FLY IN FUEL BY TWO WELLINGTONS, ESTIMATED TIME OF ARRIVAL, EIGHTEEN HUNDRED HOURS".

BY WIMPEYS? THEY'LL BE SITTING DUCKS IF JERRY'S FIGHTERS CATCH 'EM.

WHAT LITTLE FUEL THERE WAS LEFT ON THE AIRFIELD WAS LOADED INTO BILL'S HURRICANE AND HE TOOK OFF TO MEET THE WELLINGTONS. THE BOMBERS CARRIED ONLY A PILOT AND NAVIGATOR EACH AND HAD BEEN STRIPPED OF ALL EXCESS WEIGHT TO GIVE THEM MAXIMUM SPEED SO THEY WERE UNARMED.

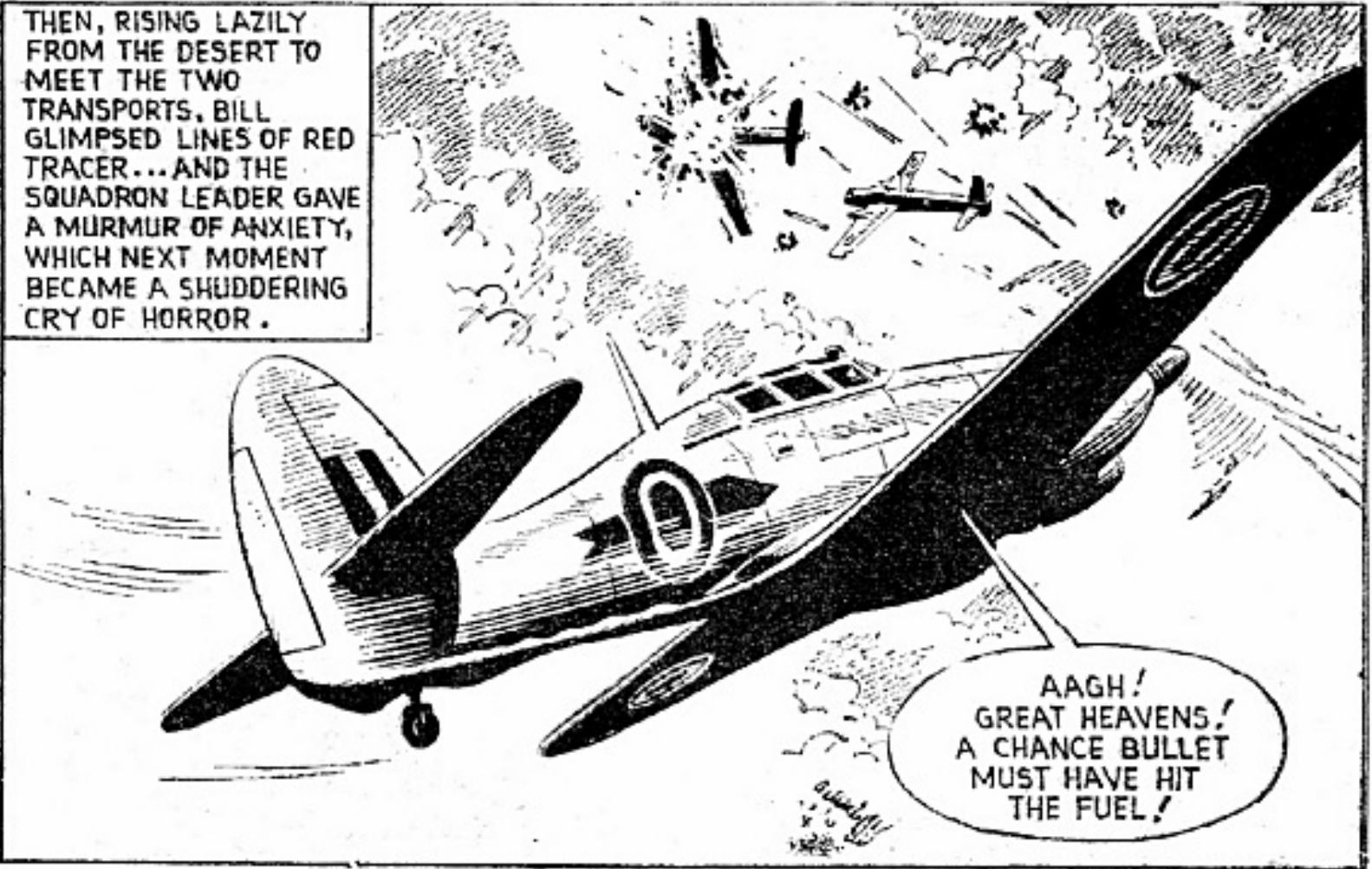
THERE GOES THE LAST OF OUR PETROL ... UNLESS ANYONE HAPPENS TO HAVE ANY IN THEIR CIGARETTE LIGHTER.

TWENTY MINUTES FLYING BROUGHT BILL CLOSE TO THE AFRIKA KORPS' LINE OF MARCH AND IN THE EVENING SKY AHEAD HE SIGHTED THE WELLINGTONS.



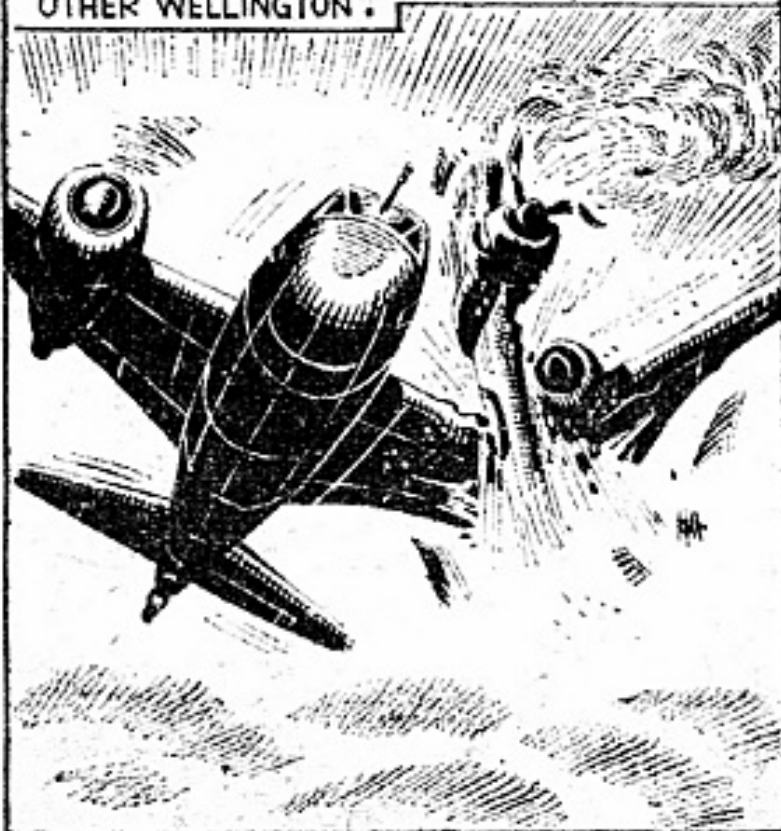
HERE THEY COME...
DEAD ON COURSE!
NO SIGN OF ENEMY
FIGHTERS.

THEN, RISING LAZILY FROM THE DESERT TO MEET THE TWO TRANSPORTS, BILL GLIMPSED LINES OF RED TRACER... AND THE SQUADRON LEADER GAVE A MURMUR OF ANXIETY, WHICH NEXT MOMENT BECAME A SHUDDERING CRY OF HORROR.



AAGH!
GREAT HEAVENS!
A CHANCE BULLET
MUST HAVE HIT
THE FUEL!

BUT WORSE WAS TO FOLLOW! THE BLAZING WRECKAGE WAS HURLED FAR AND WIDE BY THE EXPLOSION... AND BY SOME TERRIBLE MISCHANCE, PART OF IT CRASHED ON THE OTHER WELLINGTON.



WITHIN A FEW FATAL SECONDS, THE SECOND PLANE WAS SPINNING EARTHWARDS AFTER THE FIRST... AND ALL THAT REMAINED IN THE SKY WERE TWO PARACHUTES. WITH ONE TRACER BULLET, TWO GREAT AIRCRAFT WERE DESTROYED, TWO MEN HAD DIED AND THE HOPES OF BILL HUNTER'S SQUADRON WERE SHATTERED.



BY THE TIME BILL HAD RETURNED TO HIS AIRFIELD AGAIN, HIS NUMBED MIND HAD RECOVERED SOMEWHAT FROM THE SHOCK AND WAS SEARCHING FOR ANOTHER SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF HIS SQUADRON'S LACK OF FUEL.



WHAT HAPPENED, SKIPPER?
WHERE ARE THE
WIMPEYS?

THEY WERE HIT BY FLAK, FRANK. THE CREW OF ONE BALED OUT, BUT THE OTHERS NEVER HAD A CHANCE. NOW, LISTEN, I'VE GOT AN IDEA THAT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE OF GETTING OPERATIONAL AGAIN.

WHEN HE HAD HEARD HIS C.O.'S PLAN, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ADAMS AGREED WHOLEHEARTEDLY THAT IT WAS STARK, STARING CRAZY... BUT THEREIN LAY ITS CHANCE OF SUCCESS. AS THE EVENING DUSK DEEPENED, PREPARATIONS WERE COMPLETED.

JERRY'S AIRFIELD AT MASHUB IS ONLY SIXTY MILES FROM US BUT THEY DON'T KNOW WE'RE SO FAR FORWARD. THE LAST THING THEY'LL BE EXPECTING IS SOMEONE PINCHING THEIR PETROL SUPPLIES AT DEAD OF NIGHT.

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT, SKIPPER. GOOD LUCK TO YOU ALL!



EVEN DRIVING AS FAST AS THEY DARED IN THAT WILD ROCK-STREWN COUNTRY, IT WAS AFTER MIDNIGHT BEFORE BILL HUNTER'S PARTY NEARED THEIR OBJECTIVE.

WE'LL HIDE THE TRUCK IN THAT WADI OVER THERE AND APPROACH THE DROME ON FOOT. WHEN WE FIND A COUPLE OF PETROL TANKERS, YOU, CORPORAL SMITH, MAKE SURE THAT THE ENGINES START... AND THEN WE'LL HEAD FOR HOME ... *FAST!*



THEY FOUND THE PETROL TANKERS AT A DISPERSAL POINT ... WITH A SENTRY ON GUARD ...



THERE'S ONLY ONE MAN ON GUARD THERE! STAY HERE WHILE I DEAL WITH HIM!

THE SENTRY NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM!



SORRY, CHUM... LET'S HOPE YOU'RE NOT DUE TO BE RELIEVED FOR ANOTHER COUPLE OF HOURS.

ONLY TWO OF THE TANKERS WERE FULLY LOADED WITH AVIATION FUEL ... AND UNDER THE SKILFUL HANDS OF CORPORAL JOE SMITH, THEIR POWERFUL ENGINES THROBBED INTO LIFE. THEN THE TWO DRIVERS TOOK OVER.



THEY'RE BOTH READY TO GO, SIR!

RIGHT! LEAD THE WAY AS QUIETLY AS POSSIBLE TO WHERE WE LEFT OUR TRUCK, DRIVER...

HALF A MILE FROM THE ENEMY AIRFIELD THERE WAS STILL NO SOUND OF THE ALARM BEING GIVEN AND THE LITTLE CONVOY BEGAN ITS DASH FOR HOME.



WHERE THE GROUND WAS HARD THEY MADE GOOD FAST PROGRESS BUT OFTEN THEY WERE FORCED TO FIND A WAY ROUND ROCKY OUTCROPS OF SOFT SAND. DURING ONE OF THESE PERIODS OF SLOW, LABORIOUS GOING, SMITHY SUDDENLY JAMMED HIS FOOT ON THE BRAKE AND POINTED AHEAD...

L-LOOK, SIR! ISN'T THAT
THE WRECK OF A...

A
HURRICANE!



BILL HUNTER CLIMBED FROM THE CABIN OF THE TRUCK... AND AS HE SLOWLY WALKED TOWARDS THE GAUNT WRECKAGE OF THE ONCE STREAMLINED FIGHTER, A COLD, UNCANNY FEELING OF FOREBODING CREPT OVER HIM.

IT-IT'S
RIP'S PLANE!
BUT WHERE IS
HIS BODY?



SHAKEN BY THIS CHANCE ENCOUNTER AND MYSTIFIED BY THE ABSENCE OF HIS FRIEND'S BODY, BILL ONCE MORE RE-LIVED IN HIS MIND RIP JACKSON'S LAST MOMENTS.

THAT'S QUEER!
COULD RIP HAVE
SURVIVED THE CRASH?
WHAT DID HE SAY
NOW... "BILL,
YOUR MISTAKE
ENEMY..." HE
RECKONED HE SAW
SOMETHING ON THE
GROUND... IS IT
POSSIBLE THAT HE
DID AND WAS
TELLING ME I WAS
WRONG WHEN
I LAUGHED
AT HIM?



BILL QUICKENED HIS PACE AS HE APPROACHED THE THREE WAITING VEHICLES... AND HIS ORDERS WERE FIRM AND DECISIVE.

CAN YOU CHAPS FIND
YOUR WAY BACK TO
THE DROME FROM
HERE?



YES, SIR!
IT SHOULD BE
PLAIN GOING
HERE ONWARDS!

RIGHT! CARRY ON WITH
THE TANKERS THEN. CORPORAL
SMITH AND I HAVE SOME SCOUTING TO DO
BEFORE WE FOLLOW YOU. DON'T
WAIT FOR US.

THE GREAT FUEL TANKERS ROARED OFF INTO THE DARKNESS AND BILL HUNTER LED CORPORAL SMITH ON A SEARCH OF THE SURROUNDING AREA.

I'VE A FEELING THERE'S SOMETHING AROUND HERE THAT NEEDS EXPLAINING, SMITHY. KEEP YOUR EYES SKINNED AND YOUR FINGER ON THAT TRIGGER.

OKAY, SIR.



THEY WERE A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THEIR TRUCK WHEN FROM THE DISTANCE THERE CAME A RATTLE OF SHOTS AND IN THE EERIE HALF LIGHT THAT PRECEDES THE DAWN, THEY GLIMPSED A FIGURE STUMBLING TOWARDS THEM.

SOMEONE'S IN TROUBLE... AND THOSE SHOTS CAME FROM A JERRY SPANDAU M.G. GET INTO COVER BEHIND THOSE ROCKS, SMITHY, AND HOLD YOUR FIRE!



THE FIGURE CAME ON... STAGGERED... THEN PITCHED HEADLONG TO THE SAND. OTHER SHAPES MATERIALIZED ON THE RIDGE, WEAPONS GLINTING IN THEIR HANDS. THEY MOVED REMORSELESSLY NEARER UNTIL A BURST OF FIRE FROM JOE SMITH SENT THEM SCUTTling FOR COVER.

THEY'RE JERRIES!
TAKE THAT, YOU
PERISHERS!

THAT'S RIGHT, SMITHY! KEEP
THEIR HEADS DOWN AND I'LL
HAVE A SHOT AT GETTING
THAT CHAP BACK HERE.

CORPORAL SMITH SENT A LONG BURST ZIPPING AROUND
THE BOULDERS WHERE THE GERMANS WERE CROUCHING... AND
BILL LEAPED TOWARDS THE STILL FIGURE ON THE GROUND.



AMID A HAIL OF FLYING LEAD, THE SQUADRON LEADER GRASPED THE SENSELESS MAN AND BEGAN TO PULL HIM TOWARDS THE COVER OF THE ROCKS . . .



UNINJURED SAVE FOR A SCARLET FURROW ACROSS THE BACK OF HIS HAND, BILL PROPPED THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN UP AGAINST A BOULDER... AND INSTANTLY UTTERED A LOUD CRY OF UNBELIEVING AMAZEMENT.



IT'S --- IT'S RIP!
SMITHY, IT'S
RIP JACKSON!

Chapter 4. THE HIDDEN FORCE

STARTLED BY RIP JACKSON'S RETURN SEEMINGLY FROM THE DEAD, THE TWO ENGLISHMEN FORGOT FOR A MOMENT THEIR PRECARIOUS POSITION.

LOOK OUT,
SIR!

JEEPERS! THAT WAS CLOSE!
WE'RE IN A SPOT HERE,
SMITHY!

THEY WERE IN A SPOT... AND A SUDDEN SHOUT AT THEIR BACKS MADE BILL SWING ROUND IN ALARM... BUT THE WORDS AND THE VOICE WERE ENGLISH!

NEED ANY HELP, YOU CHAPS?
KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN
AND WE'LL GIVE YOU
COVERING FIRE.

THE L.R.D.G...
BY ALL THAT'S
WONDERFUL!

THE MACHINE GUNS OF THE DESERT PATROL SENT A TORNADO OF STEEL LASHING ABOUT THE GERMANS, AND BILL AND SMITHY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE LULL IN THE ENEMY'S FIRE TO CARRY RIP TO THEIR TRUCK.

EASY WITH HIM, SMITHY...
HE LOOKS PRETTY BADLY
KNOCKED ABOUT.



WITH BILL SUPPORTING RIP JACKSON IN THE BACK, CORPORAL SMITH STARTED THE ENGINE AND DROVE AT FULL SPEED FROM THE SCENE ... AND SOON THE L.R.D.G. TRUCKS WERE RACING AFTER THEM.



ROCKED ABOUT BY THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPEEDING TRUCK, THE LIMP FIGURE OF RIP JACKSON STIRRED FEEBLY... THEN HIS EYES FLICKERED OPEN... AND WIDENED IN WILD SURPRISE.

B-BILL!
I MUST BE
DREAMING!



YOU'RE NOT DREAMING,
RIP, YOU OLD SON OF A GUN.
HOW THE DICKENS DID YOU GET
OUT OF THAT CRASH ALIVE...
AND WHERE HAVE YOU
BEEN?

RIP CLOSED HIS EYES FOR A MOMENT AS IF GATHERING STRENGTH, THEN HE TOLD HIS STORY...

I WAS THROWN CLEAR WHEN MY OLD BUS PRANGED, BILL... AND PASSED OUT. WHEN I CAME TO, I HAD BEEN MOVED BY JERRIES INTO A CAMOUFLAGED WADI WHERE THEY HAVE SEVENTY OR EIGHTY TANKS HIDDEN.



IT WAS BILL HUNTER'S TURN TO BE SURPRISED. . . AND IMMEDIATELY HE RECOGNISED THE POTENTIAL MENACE OF THIS HIDDEN ARMOURED FORCE.

GREAT SCOTT! THEY MUST BE THE MISSING TANKS H.Q. HAVE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT... WE MUST WIRELESS THIS INFORMATION BACK TO THEM AT ONCE.

THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME, BILL. I GATHERED THAT THEY'RE MOVING OUT THIS COMING MORNING... THAT'S WHY I TRIED TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT.



THERE HAD BEEN NO SOUNDS OF PURSUIT AND BILL SIGNALLED LIEUTENANT BOB SHARP IN THE FOLLOWING L.R.D.G. VEHICLE TO DRAW TO A HALT.

THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HAS SOME VITAL INFORMATION ABOUT A HIDDEN ENEMY TANK FORCE WHICH WE MUST SIGNAL BACK!

CAN'T BE DONE, SIR - OUR WIRELESS WAS HIT IN THE SET-TO BACK THERE! THAT TANK FORCE MUST BE THE ONE WE HAVE BEEN TRYING TO TRACE.



THEN WE MUST PRESS ON TO OUR AIRFIELD. WE CAN GET THROUGH TO BASE FROM THERE. OFF YOU GO, SMITHY... AND DRIVE AS IF THE DEVIL HIMSELF WAS AFTER YOU.

CORPORAL SMITH DID JUST THAT! AT TIMES, ALL FOUR WHEELS OF THE TRUCK WERE OFF THE GROUND AND TWO BRUISING, HAIR-RAISING HOURS LATER, THEY WERE THREADING THEIR WAY THROUGH THE HILLS CLOSE TO THE AERODROME. SUDDENLY BILL THUMPED THE CORPORAL ON THE SHOULDER...


SLOW DOWN, SMITHY... THERE ARE THE TANKERS AHEAD! WHY HAVE THEY HALTED?

THE TRUCK SCREECHED TO A HALT CLOSE TO THE TANKERS AND THEIR DRIVERS HURRIED FORWARD TO MEET IT.


THE FIELD'S BEING STRAFED BY JERRY FIGHTERS, SIR.

WE THOUGHT WE'D BETTER NOT TAKE THE BOWSERS ANY NEARER. SIR. THEY'D MAKE A NICE TARGET FOR A GUN-HAPPY JERRY PILOT.

H'MM! QUITE RIGHT, LADS. WAIT HERE AND I'LL GO FORWARD TO SEE HOW THINGS ARE GOING.



A LONE GERMAN RECONNAISSANCE PLANE HAD DISCOVERED THE BASE OF THE FIGHTER BOMBER SQUADRON WHICH HAD BEEN CREATING HAVOC IN THE GERMAN LINES. NOW, WITH ITS PLANES GROUNDED FOR LACK OF FUEL, THE R.A.F. SQUADRON WAS BEING RELENTLESSLY DESTROYED BY VENGEFUL LUFTWAFFE FIGHTERS.




THERE WON'T BE A PLANE LEFT TO PUT OUR FUEL INTO SOON... WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING OR MY SQUADRON WILL BE WIPED OUT. LISTEN, LIEUTENANT, SEE THAT WADI DOWN THERE... THIS IS WHAT I'M GOING TO TRY...

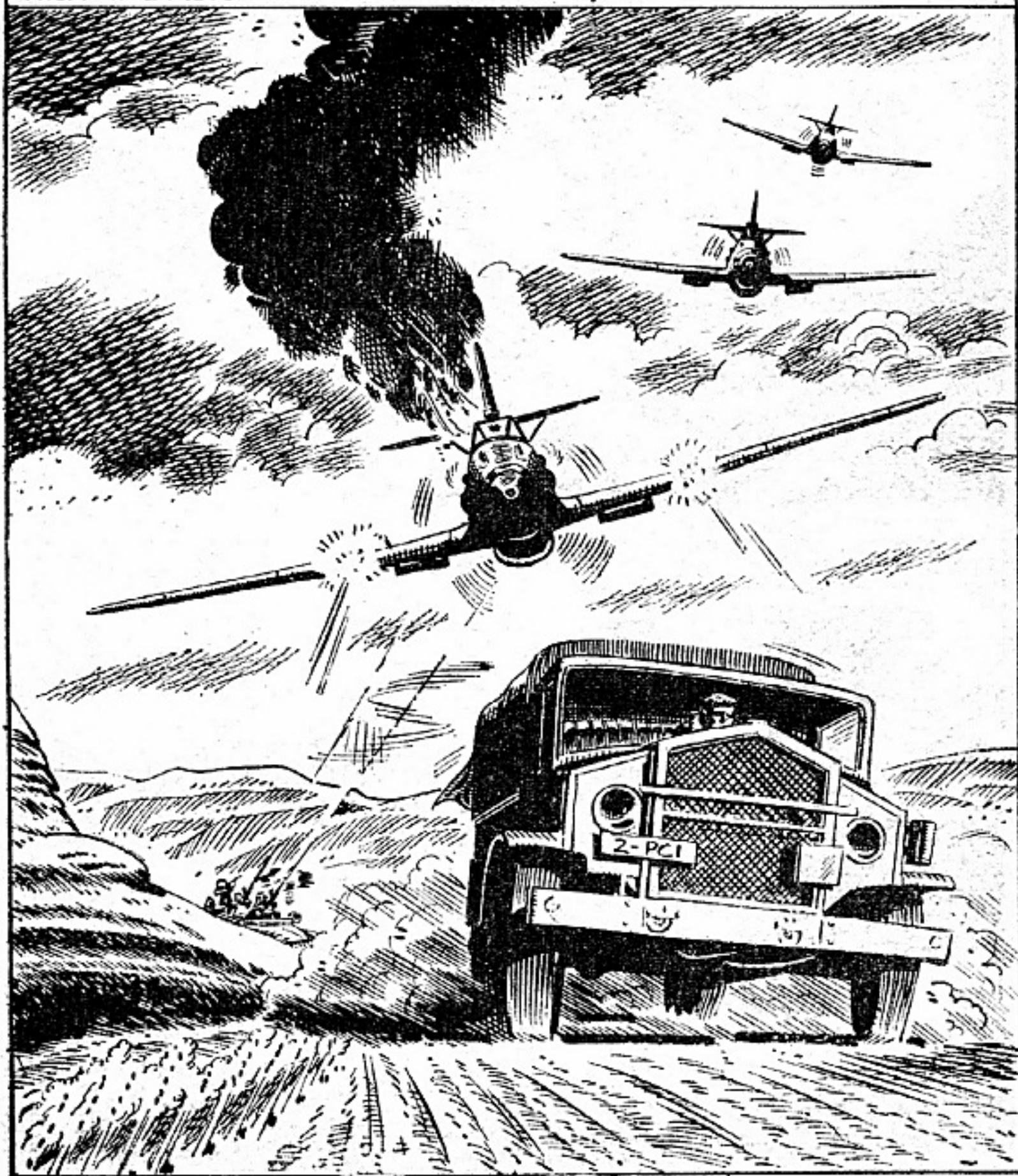
TEN MINUTES LATER, AS A FRESH FLIGHT OF MESSERSCHMITTS ARRIVED, EAGER TO COMPLETE THE ANNIHILATION OF THE HATED ENEMY, THEY NOTICED A LONE TRUCK DRIVE IMPUDENTLY OUT FROM THE HILLS ON TO THE FLAT PLAIN.

ACHTUNG!

SEE, A STUPID ENGLISCHER OFFERS HIMSELF AS A SACRIFICE TO OUR HUNGRY GUNS!



ONE BEHIND THE OTHER, THE M.E. 109'S DIVED AT THE TRUCK, ITS DRIVER SEEMINGLY OBLIVIOUS OF HIS PERIL. THE OPENING BURST OF MACHINE GUN FIRE FLAMED FROM THE LEADING FIGHTER'S WINGS ... AND THE TRUCK CASUALLY ZIG-ZAGGED OUT OF DANGER. NEXT MOMENT, A HAIL OF LEAD CAME SWEEPING UP AT THE PLANE FROM THE L.R.D.G. TRUCK'S HIDDEN IN THE WADI!



SO CLOSE WERE THEY ON THE TAIL OF THEIR LEADER, THE OTHER TWO GERMAN FIGHTERS HAD NO TIME TO TAKE EVASIVE ACTION. THE FIRST FLEW STRAIGHT INTO THE WRECKAGE AND THE SECOND WAS RIDDLED WITH BULLETS AS IT FRANTICALLY TRIED TO CLIMB AWAY.

I COULDN'T MISS HIM WITH MY EYES SHUT!

WHAT A NERVE THAT RAFF BLOKE'S GOT! DRIVING OUT THERE AS COOL AS YOU LIKE, INVITING THEM TO HAVE A GO AT HIM!

AS SOON AS HE SAW THAT HIS AUDACIOUS PLAN HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL, BILL SENT THE TRUCK SPEEDING ACROSS THE AIRFIELD.

I'LL GET A WIRELESS MESSAGE OFF TO BASE WHILE THE TANKERS ARE BRINGING THE FUEL TO THE PLANES.

BUT ONCE AGAIN HE WAS FRUSTRATED. WHEN HE REACHED THE WIRELESS TENT, HE FOUND IT A CHAOS OF WRECKED EQUIPMENT.

GLAD TO SEE YOU BACK, SIR...
I SEE YOU'VE BROUGHT US SOME
PETROL, TOO. IF ONLY WE'D HAD
IT TWO HOURS AGO...

WE GOT THE PETROL, FRANK...
AND FOUND RIP JACKSON...
ALIVE! HE'S IN ONE OF THE TRUCKS
ACROSS THERE. RIP'S GIVEN US SOME
INFORMATION THAT WE MUST GET BACK
TO BASE... BUT IT LOOKS AS IF OUR
WIRELESS SET HAS HAD IT.

THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR IT. AS SOON
AS A PLANE IS FUELLED UP, SOMEONE
WILL HAVE TO FLY TO BASE - YOU'D BETTER
GO, FRANK. THEN WE'LL FILL UP ANY OTHER
PLANES THAT ARE IN ONE PIECE - FIRSTLY,
IN CASE THE JERRIES COME BACK, AND
SECONDLY, BECAUSE WE'VE GOT A NUMBER
ONE TARGET.

RIGHT, SKIPPER...
LET ME HAVE THE GEN
AND I'LL GET CRACKING.

TEN MINUTES LATER, WHILE RIP JACKSON WAS
RECEIVING A RAPTUREOUS WELCOME FROM HIS
FELLOW DESERT PILOTS, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT
ADAMS TOOK OFF ON HIS VITAL MISSION.

WHERE THE HECK HAVE YOU BEEN,
RIP? WE'D EVEN TAKEN YOUR NAME
OFF THE LEAVE ROSTER.

WELL, YOU CAN
JOLLY WELL PUT
IT BACK AGAIN!

THIS DAY, NOVEMBER 26TH, WAS A CRUCIAL DAY IN THE WESTERN DESERT FOR THE ALLIES AND GERMANS ALIKE. THE TOBRUK GARRISON WAS ALREADY WITHIN SIGHT OF THE NEW ZEALANDERS WHO HAD CAPTURED SIDI REZEGH. BUT THE GREATER PART OF ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS HAD BY-PASSED THIS BATTLE AND HAD REACHED THE EGYPTIAN FRONTIER. THERE IT TURNED NORTH AFTER WREAKING HAVOC IN THE REAP AREAS.

AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS.

SHARP'S L.R.D.G. PATROL HASN'T REPORTED IN TODAY, SIR... SO WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE THOSE GERMAN TANKS ARE.

THIS COULD BE THE MOMENT WHEN ROMMEL WOULD THROW THEM INTO THE BATTLE... PROBABLY IN AN EFFORT TO PREVENT THE LINK-UP BETWEEN THE TOBRUK GARRISON AND THE NEW ZEALANDERS. YOU'D BETTER ARRANGE FOR A CONTINUOUS AIR RECONNAISSANCE OVER THE VITAL AREA TODAY, COLONEL HUMPHREYS.

AS COLONEL HUMPHREYS TURNED TOWARDS THE DOOR IT OPENED TO REVEAL AN ORDERLY AND AN R.A.F PILOT... FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ADAMS.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ADAMS REPORTING, SIR. I HAVE SOME VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION... THE LOCATION OF A LARGE FORCE OF ENEMY TANKS.

THANK HEAVENS THEY'VE BEEN FOUND. THE OUTCOME OF THE WHOLE OPERATION CAN DEPEND UPON THE MOVEMENTS OF THOSE TANKS. NOW, LIEUTENANT, COME OVER TO THE MAP AND SHOW ME WHERE THEY ARE... THEN WE'LL LAY ON A BOMBER ATTACK.

BY THE TIME FRANK ADAMS HAD REACHED HEADQUARTERS, BILL HUNTER AND HIS MEN HAD FUELLED AND FITTED BOMBS TO THOSE AIRCRAFT THAT WERE STILL SERVICEABLE... FIVE PLANES ONLY.

TWO ARE AS GOOD AS NEW, SIR, BUT WE'VE HAD TO PATCH THE OTHERS UP A BIT. THEY'LL SEE YOU THROUGH, THOUGH.

THANKS, SERGEANT... YOU AND YOUR MEN HAVE DONE WELL TO GET FIVE OPERATIONAL.

BILL STRODE OVER TO HIS PILOTS WHO WERE STANDING IN A GROUP... EACH DRESSED, READY TO FLY.

SORRY, CHAPS... I KNOW YOU ALL WANT TO TAKE A PLANE, SO I'M NOT ASKING FOR VOLUNTEERS. WILL THE FOLLOWING STEP FORWARD, PLEASE... CAREY, HICKMAN, CLARKE AND ...

...JACKSON!

AN EAGER LAUGHING VOICE FORESTALLED BILL HUNTER.

BILL SWUNG ROUND, WORDS OF PROTEST ON HIS LIPS.

NOW, LOOK HERE, RIP ...
YOU'RE NOT FIT TO
FLY AGAIN YET.

NONSENSE, BILL.
I'M AS FIT AS A FIDDLE.
ANYWAY, IF ANYONE HERE
DESERVES A CRACK AT THOSE
JERRY TANKS, IT'S ME! IF IT
WASN'T FOR ME, YOU WOULDN'T
HAVE KNOWN THEY WERE THERE!

THERE WAS JUSTICE IN WHAT RIP JACKSON SAID, AND SINCE NONE OF THE OTHER PILOTS CAME FORWARD TO DISPUTE THE CLAIM, BILL RELUCTANTLY AGREED.

COME ON, BILL ... LAST
OFF THE GROUND'S
A DUMMY.

STEADY UP,
YOU HAREBRAINED
IDIOT ...

WISTFULLY, YET PROUDLY, THE REST
OF THE SQUADRON WATCHED THE
FIVE HURRICANES SOAR UPWARDS.

GIVE 'EM
A CANING FOR US,
BLOKES!

WITH BILL
AND RIP TOGETHER
AGAIN, JERRY'S GOT
A HEADACHE
COMING TO HIM.

THE TINY ARROWHEAD
OF HURRIBOMBERS
RIPPED ACROSS THE SKY.

RED LEADER CALLING.
TARGET ONE MILE AHEAD...
CHECK, RIP?
OVER.

RED TWO
TO RED LEADER.
CORRECT, BILL.
OVER.

BILL PUSHED HIS CONTROL COLUMN FORWARD AND AS THE PLANES FOLLOWED HIM INTO
THE ATTACK, THE BRITISH PILOTS SAW THAT THEY HAD ARRIVED NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON.

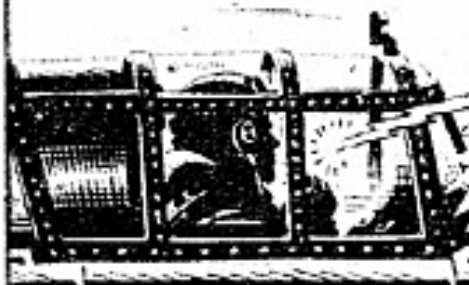
RED LEADER
CALLING. THEY'VE VERY
KINDLY SHOWN US EXACTLY
WHERE THEY ARE. WE'D
BETTER STOP THAT RAT HOLE.
AFTER ME, BOYS.



WITH DEADLY ACCURACY, BILL HUNTER'S FIGHTER-BOMBERS PIN-POINTED WITH 250 POUND BOMBS THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAMOUFLAGED WADI.

THEIR BOMBS DROPPED, THE HURRIBOMBERS CLIMBED TO JOIN BILL HUNTER, AND THEN A SHADY MASS OF PLANES DARKENED THE EASTERN HORIZON.

RED LEADER CALLING. FRANK GOT THROUGH WITH HIS MESSAGE... HERE COME OUR HEAVY LADS TO FINISH OFF THE JOB. OVER.



RED TWO TO RED LEADER. BANDITS TEN O'CLOCK, BILL. LOOKING FOR A SCRAP, I SHOULDN'T WONDER.

ALTHOUGH THEY WERE OBVIOUSLY OUT-NUMBERED, THE R.A.F. FIGHTERS TURNED TO GIVE BATTLE.



RED LEADER CALLING. IT'S UP TO US TO STOP JERRY GETTING AT THE BOMBERS! GOOD LUCK, LADS!

TALLY-HO! ANYONE FOR TENNIS?

THE AIR BECAME A CONFUSION OF CLIMBING, DIVING AND WEAVING PLANES.



FOR THIRTY PRECIOUS SECONDS, THE FIVE HURRICANES KEPT THE MESSERSCHMITTS AWAY FROM THE WELLINGTONS AS THE BOMBERS UNLOADED THEIR CARGO OF DESTRUCTION ON THE GERMAN TANKS PENNED IN THEIR HIDING-PLACE.



IN THAT HALF-MINUTE, THE GERMAN'S SECRET FORCE WAS DESTROYED...AND THAT FORCE WOULD NEVER PLAY A DECISIVE PART IN THE BATTLE FOR THE WESTERN DESERT.



IN FACT, BY THE NIGHT OF THE 26TH NOVEMBER, ROMMEL FOUND IT NECESSARY TO TURN BACK FROM THE EGYPTIAN FRONTIER IN AN ENDEAVOUR TO RELIEVE HIS FORCES AT SIDI REZEGH. THE MIGHTY AFRIKA KORPS NEVER REACHED THAT FRONTIER AGAIN.

BUT HIGH ABOVE THE WRECKAGE OF THE ONCE PROUD GERMAN ARMOUR, TWO HURRICANES WERE FIGHTING FOR LIFE. THEY WERE ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THAT GALLANT FLIGHT OF FIVE.

WATCH YOUR TAIL, RIP... OKAY, NOW, HE'S LOST INTEREST IN YOU!

THANKS, BILL...

AS FAST AS ONE BLACK-CROSSED FIGHTER PLUNGED TO EARTH, HOWEVER, ANOTHER TOOK ITS PLACE. THEN, WHEN ALL APPEARED LOST FOR THE BRITISH AIRMEN, THE ENEMY SEEMED TO MELT AWAY FROM AROUND BILL HUNTER AND RIP JACKSON.

LOOK AT THAT! OUR FIGHTERS FRIGHTENED 'EM ALL AWAY JUST WHEN IT WAS GETTING INTERESTING!

ALWAYS KIDDING, EH, RIP? IT'S JUST AS WELL SOME HELP ARRIVED. NOW WE LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.

WING TIP TO WING TIP, IN A SOARING, TRIUMPHANT VICTORY ROLL, THE TWO BATTLE-SCARRED HURRICANES OF THE INSEPARABLE COMRADES, BILL HUNTER AND RIP JACKSON, STREAKED ACROSS THEIR AIRFIELD.

GOOD OLD BILL
AND RIP!

ALL THAT'S
LEFT OF THE OLD
SQUADRON.

YOU LEAVE
IT TO BILL HUNTER...
HE'LL SEE WE BECOME A
FIGHTING SQUADRON AGAIN,
AND BETTER THAN EVER!

ACTION . . . THRILLS . . . ON SALE NOW

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BATTLER BRITTON

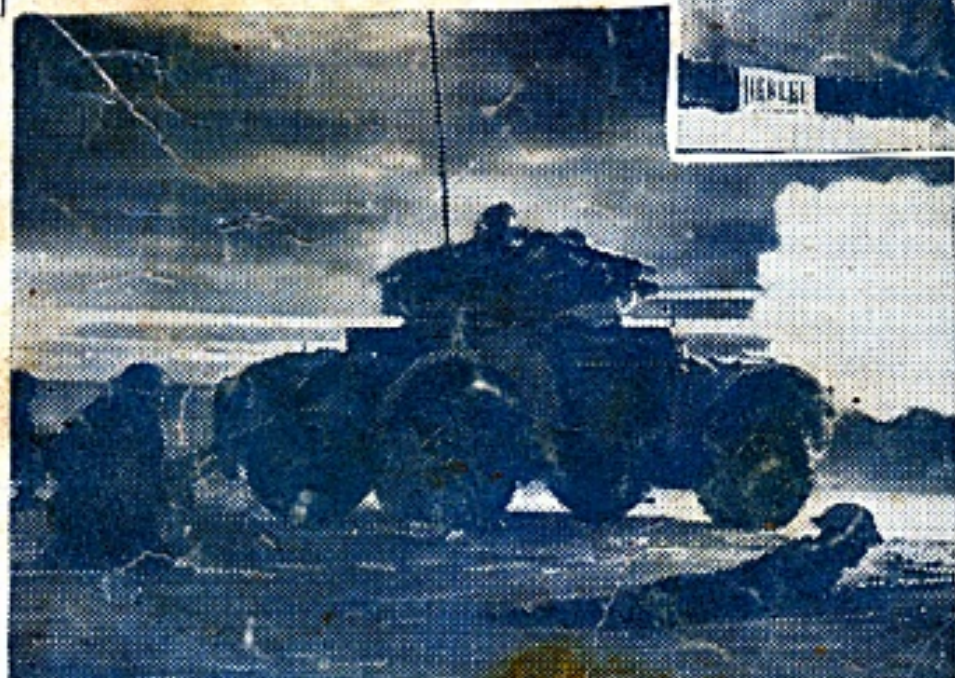


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